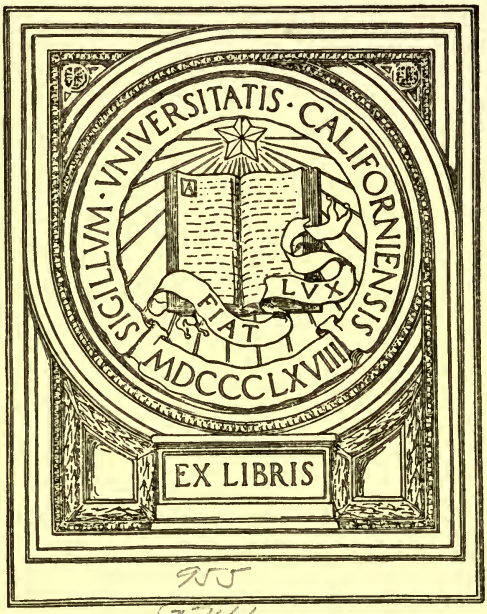
THE WIZARD'S DAUGHTER *AND* OTHER STORIES

Margaret Collier Graham

CHAUNCEY WETMORE WELLS

1872-1933



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This book belonged to Chauncey Wetmore Wells. He taught in Yale College, of which he was a graduate, from 1897 to 1901, and from 1901 to 1933 at this University.

Chauncey Wells was, essentially, a scholar. The range of his reading was wide, the breadth of his literary sympathy as uncommon as the breadth of his human sympathy. He was less concerned with the collection of facts than with meditation upon their significance. His distinctive power lay in his ability to give to his students a subtle perception of the inner implications of form, of manners, of taste, of the really disciplined and discriminating mind. And this perception appeared not only in his thinking and teaching but also in all his relations with books and with men.

By Margaret Collier Graham

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The Wizard's Daughter

and Other Stories

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By

Margaret Collier Graham

BOSTON AND NEW YORK
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IN MEMORIAM
C. W. Wells

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The Wizard's Daughter

The Wizard's Daughter

THERE had been a norther during the day, and at sunset the valley, seen from Dysart's cabin on the mesa, was a soft blur of golden haze. The wind had hurled the yellow leaves from the vineyard, exposing the gnarled deformity of the vines, and the trailing branches of the pepper-trees had swept their fallen berries into coral reefs on the southerly side.

A young man with a delicate, discontented face sat on the porch of the Dysart claim cabin, looking out over the valley. A last gust of lukewarm air strewed the floor with scythe-shaped eucalyptus-leaves, and Mrs. Dysart came out with her broom to sweep them away.

She was a large woman, with a crease at her waist that buried her apron-strings, and the little piazza creaked ominously as she

walked about. The invalid got up with a man's instinctive distrust of a broom, and began to move away.

"Don't disturb yourself, Mr. Palmerston," she said, waving him back into his chair with one hand, and speaking in a large, level voice, as if she were quelling a mob, — "don't disturb yourself; I won't raise any dust. Does the north wind choke you up much?"

"Oh, no," answered the young fellow, carelessly; "it was a rather more rapid change of air than I bargained for, but I guess it 's over now."

"Sick folks generally think the north wind makes them nervous. Some of them say it 's the electricity; but I think it 's because most of 'em 's men-folks, and being away from their families, they naturally blame things on the weather."

Mrs. Dysart turned her ample back toward her hearer, and swept a leaf-laden cobweb from the corner of the window.

The young man's face relaxed.

"I don't think it made me nervous," he said. "But then, I 'm not very ill. I 'm out

here for my mother's health. She threatened to go into a decline if I did n't come."

"Well, you 've got a consumptive build," said Mrs. Dysart, striking her broom on the edge of the porch, "and you 're light-complected; that 's likely to mean scrofula. You 'd ought to be careful. California 's a good deal of a hospital, but it don't do to depend too much on the climate. It ain't right; it 's got to be blessed to your use."

Palmerston smiled, and leaned his head against the redwood wall of the cabin. Mrs. Dysart creaked virtuously to and fro behind her broom.

"Is n't that Mr. Dysart's team?" asked the young man, presently, looking down the valley.

His companion walked to the edge of the porch and pushed back her sunbonnet to look.

"Yes," she announced, "that 's Jawn; he 's early."

She piled her cushiony hands on the end of the broom-handle, and stood still, gazing absently at the approaching team.

"I hope your mother's a Christian woman," she resumed, with a sort of corpulent severity.

The young man's face clouded, and then cleared again whimsically.

"I really never inquired," he said lightly; "but I am inclined to think she is. She is certainly not a pagan."

"You spoke as if she was a good deal wrapped up in you," continued his hostess, addressing herself unctuously to the landscape. "I was thinkin' she 'd need something to sustain her if you was to be taken away. There 's nothing but religion that can prepare us for whatever comes. I wonder who that Jawn 's a-bringin' now," she broke off suddenly, holding one of her fat hands above her eyes and leaning forward with a start. "He does pick up the queerest lot. I just held my breath the other day when I saw him fetchin' you. I 'd been wantin' a boarder all summer, and kind of lookin' for one, but I was n't no more ready for you than if you 'd been measles. It does seem sometimes as if men-folks take a satis-

faction in seein' how they can put a woman to."

Mrs. Dysart wabbled heavily indoors, where she creaked about unresignedly, putting things to rights. Palmerston closed his eyes and struggled with a smile that kept breaking into a noiseless laugh. He had a fair, high-bred face, and his smile emphasized its boyishness.

When the wagon rattled into the acacias west of the vineyard, he got up and sauntered toward the barn. John Dysart saw him coming, and took two or three steps toward him with his hand at the side of his mouth.

"He 's deaf," he whispered with a violent facial enunciation which must have assailed the stranger's remaining senses like a yell. "I think you 'll like him; he 's a wonderful talker."

The newcomer was a large, seedy-looking man, with the resigned, unexpectant manner of the deaf. Dysart went around the wagon, and the visitor put up his trumpet.

"Professor Brownell," John called into it,

"I want to make you acquainted with Mr. Palmerston. Mr. Palmerston is a young man from the East, a student at Cambridge — no, Oxford" —

"Ann Arbor," interrupted the young man, eagerly.

Dysart ignored the interruption. "He 's out here for his health."

The stranger nodded toward the young man approvingly, and dropped the trumpet as if he had heard enough.

"How do you do, Mr. Palmerston?" he said, reaching down to clasp the young fellow's slim white hand. "I 'm glad to meet a scholar in these wilds."

Palmerston blushed a helpless pink, and murmured politely. The stranger dismounted from the wagon with the awkwardness of age and avoirdupois. John Dysart stood just behind his guest, describing him as if he were a panorama: —

"I never saw his beat. He talks just like a book. He 's filled me chuck-full of science on the way up. He knows all about the inside of the earth from the top crust to China.

Ask him something about his machine, and get him started."

Palmerston glanced inquiringly toward the trumpet. The stranger raised it to his ear and leaned graciously toward him.

"Mr. Dysart is mistaken," called Palmerston, in the high, lifeless voice with which we all strive to reconcile the deaf to their affliction; "I am a Western man, from Ann Arbor."

"Better still, better still," interrupted the newcomer, grasping his hand again; "you 'll be broader, more progressive — 'the heir of all the ages,' and so forth. I was denied such privileges in my youth. But nature is an open book, 'sermons in stones.'" He turned toward the wagon and took out a small leather valise, handling it with evident care.

Dysart winked at the young man, and pointed toward the satchel.

"Jawn," called Mrs. Dysart seethingly, from the kitchen door, "what's the trouble?"

John's facial contortions stopped abruptly, as if the mainspring had snapped. He took

off his hat and scratched his head gingerly with the tip of his little finger. He had a round, bald head, with a fringe of smooth, red-brown hair below the baldness that made it look like a filbert.

"I 'm coming, Emeline," he called, glancing hurriedly from the two men to the vicinity of his wife's voice, as if anxious to bisect himself mentally and leave his hospitality with his guest.

"I 'll look after Professor Brownell," said Palmerston ; "he can step into my tent and brush up."

Dysart's countenance cleared.

"Good," he said eagerly, starting on a quick run toward the kitchen door. When he was half-way there he turned and put up his hand again. "Draw him out!" he called in a stentorian whisper. "You 'd ought to hear him talk ; it 's great. Get him started about his machine."

Palmerston smiled at the unnecessary admonition. The stranger had been talking all the time in a placid, brook-like manner while he felt under the wagon-seat for a

second and much smaller traveling-bag. The young man possessed himself of this after having been refused the first by a gentle motion of the owner's hand. The visitor accepted his signal of invitation, and followed him toward the tent.

"Our universities and colleges are useful in their way; they no doubt teach many things that are valuable: but they are not practical; they all fail in the application of knowledge to useful ends. I am not an educated man myself, but I have known many who are, and they are all alike — shallow, superficial, visionary. They need to put away their books and sit down among the everlasting hills and think. You have done well to come out here, young man. This is good; you will grow."

He stopped at the door of the tent and took off his rusty hat. The breeze blew his long linen duster about his legs.

"Have you looked much into electrical phenomena?" he asked, putting up his trumpet.

Palmerston moved a step back, and said: "No; not at all." Then he raised his hand

to possess himself of the ear-piece, and colored as he remembered that it was not a telephone. His companion seemed equally oblivious of his confusion and of his reply.

"I have made some discoveries," he went on; "I shall be pleased to talk them over with you. They will revolutionize this country." He waved his hand toward the mesa. "Every foot of this land will sometime blossom as the rose; greasewood and sage-brush will give place to the orange and the vine. Water is king in California, and there are rivers of water locked in these mountains. We must find it; yes, yes, my young friend, we must find it, and we *can* find it. I have solved that. The solution is here." He stooped and patted his satchel affectionately. "This little instrument is California's best friend. There is a future for all these valleys, wilder than our wildest dreams."

Palmerston nodded with a guilty feeling of having approved statements of which he intended merely to acknowledge the receipt, and motioned his guest into the white twilight of the tent.

"Make yourself comfortable, professor," he called. "I want to find Dysart and get my mail."

As he neared the kitchen door Mrs. Dysart's voice came to him enveloped in the sizzle of frying meat.

"Well, I don't know, Jawn; he may n't be just the old-fashioned water-witch, but it ain't right; it 's tamperin' with the secrets of the Most High, that 's what I think."

"Well, now, Emeline, you had n't ought to be hasty. He don't lay claim to anything more 'n natural; he says it 's all based on scientific principles. He says he can tell me just where to tunnel — Now, here 's Mr. Palmerston; he 's educated. I 'm going to rely on him."

"Well, I 'm goin' to rely on my heavenly Fawther," said Mrs. Dysart solemnly, from the quaking pantry.

Palmerston stood in the doorway, smiling. John jumped up and clapped his hand vigorously on his breast pockets.

"Well, now, there! I left your mail in the wagon in my other coat," he said, hook-

ing his arm through the young man's and drawing him toward the barn. "Did you get him turned on?" he asked eagerly, when they were out of his wife's hearing. "How does he strike you, anyway? Does n't he talk like a book? He wants me to help him find a claim — show him the corners, you know. He 's got a daughter down at Los Angeles; she 'll come up and keep house for him. He says he 'll locate water on shares if I 'll help him find a claim and do the tunneling. Emeline she 's afraid I 'll get left, but I think she 'll come round. Is n't it a caution the way he talks science?"

Palmerston acknowledged that it was.

"The chances are that he is a fraud, Dysart," he said kindly; "most of those people are. I 'd be very cautious about committing myself."

"Oh, I 'm cautious," protested John; "that 's one of my peculiarities. Emeline thinks because I look into things I 'm not to be trusted. She 's so quick herself she can't understand anybody that 's slow and care-

ful. Here 's your letters — quite a batch of 'em. Would you mind our putting up a cot in your tent for the professor?"

"Not at all," said the young fellow good-naturedly. "It 's excellent discipline to have a deaf man about; you realize how little you have to say that 's worth saying."

"That 's a fact, that 's a fact," said Dysart, rather too cheerfully acquiescent. "A man that can talk like that makes you ashamed to open your head."

Palmerston fell asleep that night to the placid monotone of the newcomer's voice, and awoke at daybreak to hear the same conversational flow just outside the tent. Perhaps it was Dysart's explosive "Good-morning, professor!" which seemed to have missed the trumpet and hurled itself against the canvas wall of the tent close to the sleeper's ear, that awoke him. He sat up in bed and tried to shake off the conviction that his guest had been talking all night. Dysart's greeting made no break in the cheerful optimism that filtered through the canvas.

"Last night I was an old man and

dreamed dreams; this morning I am a young man and see visions. I see this thirsty plain fed by irrigating-ditches and covered with bearing orchards. I am impatient to be off on our tramp. This is an ideal spot. With five acres of orange-trees here, producing a thousand dollars per acre, one might give his entire time to scientific investigation."

"He 'd want to look after the gophers some," yelled Dysart.

"I am astonished that this country is so little appreciated," continued Brownell, blindly unheeding. "It is no doubt due to the reckless statements of enthusiasts. It is a wonderful country — wonderful, wonderful, wonderful!"

There was a diminuendo in the repeated adjective that told Palmerston the speaker was moving toward the house; and it was from that direction that he heard Mrs. Dysart, a little later, assuring her visitor, in a high, depressed voice, that she had n't found the country yet that would support anybody without elbow-grease, and she did n't expect

to till it was Gawd's will to take her to her heavenly home.

John Dysart and his visitor returned from their trip in the mountains, that evening, tired, dusty, and exultant. The professor's linen duster had acquired several of those triangular rents which have the merit of being beyond masculine repair, and may therefore be conscientiously endured. He sat on the camp-chair at Palmerston's tent door, his finger-tips together and his head thrown back in an ecstasy of content.

"This is certainly the promised land," he said gravely, "a land flowing with milk and honey. Nature has done her share lavishly: soil, climate, scenery — everything but water; yes, and water, too, waiting for the brain, the hand of man, the magic touch of science — the one thing left to be conquered to give the sense of mastery, of possession. This country is ours by right of conquest." He waved his hands majestically toward the valley. "In three months we shall have a stream flowing from these mountains that will transform every foot of ground before you. These

people seem worthy, though somewhat narrow. It will be a pleasure to share prosperity with them as freely as they share their poverty with me."

Palmerston glanced conversationally toward the trumpet, and his companion raised it to his ear.

"Dysart is a poor man," shouted Palmerston, "but he is the best fellow in the world. I should hate to see him risk anything on an uncertainty."

Brownell had been nodding his head backward and forward with dreamy emphasis; he now shook it horizontally, closing his eyes. "There is no uncertainty," he said, lowering his trumpet; "that is the advantage of science: you can count upon it with absolute certainty. I am glad the man is poor — very glad; it heightens the pleasure of helping him."

The young man turned away a trifle impatiently.

"A reservoir will entail some expense," the professor rambled on; "but the money will come. 'To him that hath shall be given.'"

Palmerston's face completed the quotation, but the speaker went on without opening his eyes: "When the water is once flowing out of the tunnel, capital will flow into it."

"A good deal of capital will flow into the tunnel before any water flows out of it," growled Palmerston, taking advantage of his companion's physical defect to relieve his mind.

Later in the evening Dysart drew the young man into the family conference, relying upon the sympathy of sex in the effort to allay his wife's misgivings.

"The tunnel won't cost over two dollars a foot, with what I can do myself," maintained the little man, "and the professor says we'll strike water that'll drown us out before we've gone a hundred feet. Emeline here she's afraid of it because it sounds like a meracle, but I tell her it's pure science. It is n't any more wonderful than a needle traveling toward a magnet: the machine tells where the water is, and how far off it is, something like a compass — I don't un-

derstand it, but I can see that it ain't any more meraculous than a telegraph. It 's science."

"Oh, yes, I know," mourned Mrs. Dysart, who overflowed a small rocking-chair on the piazza; "there 's folks that think the creation of the world in six days is nothin' but science, but they 're not people for Christians to be goin' pardners with. If Gawd has put a hundred feet of dirt on top of that water, I tell Jawn he had his reasons, and I can't think it 's right for anybody whose treasure ought to be laid up in heaven to go pryin' into the bowels of the earth huntin' for things that our heavenly Fawther 's hid."

"But there 's gold, Emeline."

"Oh, yes; I know there 's gold, and I know 'the love of money is the root of all evil.' I don't say that the Lord don't reign over the inside of the earth, but I do say that people that get their minds fixed on things that 's underground are liable to forget the things that are above."

"Well, now, I 'm sure they had n't ought," protested Dysart. "I 'm sure 'the earth is

the Lord's, and the fullness thereof,' Emeline."

Mrs. Dysart sank slowly back in her chair at this unexpected thrust from her own weapon, and then rallied with a long, corpulent sigh.

"Well, I don't know. You recollect that old man was up here last winter, hammerin' around among the rocks as if the earth was a big nut that he was tryin' to crack? I talked with him long enough to find out what he was; he was an *atheist*."

Mrs. Dysart leaned forward and whispered the last word in an awe-struck tone, with her fat eyes fixed reproachfully upon her husband.

"Oh, I guess not, Emeline," pleaded John.

Mrs. Dysart shut her lips and her eyes very tight, and nodded slowly and affirmatively. "Yes, he was. He set right in that identical spot where Mr. Palmerston is a-settin', and talked about the seven theological periods of creation, and the fables of Jonah and the whale and Noah's ark, till I was all of a

tremble. Mebbe that 's science, Jawn, but *I* call it blasphemin'."

Dysart rested his elbows on his knees and looked over the edge of the porch as if he were gazing into the bottomless pit.

"Oh, come, now, Mrs. Dysart," Palmerston broke in cheerfully; "I 'm not at all afraid of Mr. Dysart losing his faith, but I 'm very much afraid of his losing his money. I wish he had as good a grip on his purse as he has on his religion."

Mrs. Dysart glanced at the young man with a look of relief to find him agreeing with her in spite of his irreverent commingling of the temporal and the spiritual.

"Well, I 'm sure we 've lost enough already, when it comes to that," she continued, folding her hands resignedly in her convex lap. "There was that artesian well down at San Pasqual" —

"Well, now, Emeline," her husband broke in eagerly, "that well would have been all right if the tools had n't stuck. I think yet we 'd have got water if we 'd gone on."

"We 'd 'a' got water if it had 'a' been our

heavenly Fawther's will," announced Mrs. Dysart, with solemnity, rising slowly from her chair, which gave a little squeak of relief. "I 've got to set the sponge," she went on in the same tone, as if it were some sacred religious rite. "I wish you 'd talk it over with Mr. Palmerston, Jawn, and tell him the offer you 've had from this perfessor — I 'm sure I don't know what he 's perfessor of. He ain't a perfessor of religion — I know that."

She sent her last arrow over her wide shoulder as she passed the two men and creaked into the house. Her husband looked after her gravely.

"Now that 's the way with Emeline," he said; "she 's all faith, and then, again, she has no faith. Now, I 'm just the other way." He rubbed his bald head in a vain attempt to formulate the obverse of his wife's character. "Well, anyway," he resumed, accepting his failure cheerfully, "the professor he wants to find a claim, as I was telling you, but he wants one that 's handy to the place he 's selected for the tunnel. Of course he won't say just where that is till we get

the papers made out, but he gave me a kind of a general idea of it, and the land around there 's all mine. He 'd have to go 'way over east to find a government section that has n't been filed on, and of course there 'd be a big expense for pipe; so he offers to locate the tunnel for half the water if we get ten inches or over, and I 'm to make the tunnel, and deed him twenty acres of land."

"Suppose you get less than ten inches — what then?"

"Then it 's all to be mine; but I 'm to deed him the land all the same."

"How many inches of water have you from your spring now?"

"About ten, as near as I can guess."

"Well, suppose he locates the tunnel so it will drain your spring; are you to have the expense of the work and the privilege of giving him half the water and twenty acres of land — is that it?"

John rubbed the back of his neck and reflected.

"The professor laughs at the idea of ten inches of water. He says we 'll get at least

a hundred, maybe more. You see, if we were to get that much, I'd have a lot of water to sell to the settlers below. It 'u'd be a big thing."

"So it would; but there's a big 'if' in there, Dysart. Do you know anything about this man's record?"

"I asked about him down in Los Angeles. Some folks believe in him, and some don't. They say he struck a big stream for them over at San Luis. I don't go much on what people say, anyway; I size a man up, and depend on that. I like the way the professor talks. I don't understand all of it, but he seems to have things pretty pat. Don't you think he has?"

"Yes; he has things pat enough. Most swindlers have. It's their business. Not that I think him a deliberate swindler, Dysart. Possibly he believes in himself. But I hope you 'll be cautious."

"Oh, I'm cautious," asserted John. "I'd be a good deal richer man to-day if I had n't been so cautious. I've spent a lot of time and money looking into things. I'll get

there, if caution 'll do it. Now, Emeline she's impulsive; she has to be held back; she never examines into anything: but I'm just the other way."

In spite of Palmerston's warning and Mrs. Dysart's fears, temporal and spiritual, negotiations between Dysart and Brownell made rapid progress. The newcomer's tent was pitched upon the twenty acres selected, and gleamed white against the mountain-side, suggesting to Palmerston's idle vision a sail becalmed upon a sage-green sea. "Dysart's ship, which will probably never come in," he said to himself, looking at it with visible indignation, one morning, as he sat at his tent door in that state of fuming indolence which the male American calls taking a rest.

"Practically there is little difference between a knave and a fool," he fretted; "it's the difference between the gun that is loaded and the one that is not: in the long run the unloaded gun does the more mischief. A self-absorbed fool is a knave. After all, dishonesty is only abnormal selfishness; it's a question of degree. Hello, Dysart!" he said

aloud, as his host appeared around the tent. "How goes it?"

"Slow," said John emphatically, "slow. I 'm feeling my way like a cat, and the professor he 's just about as cautious as I am. We 're a good team. He 's been over the cañon six times, and every time that machine of his'n gives him a new idea. He 's getting it down to a fine point. He wanted to go up again to-day, but I guess he can't."

"What 's up?" inquired Palmerston indifferently.

"Well, his daughter wrote him she was coming this afternoon, and somebody 'll have to meet her down at Malaga when the train comes in. I 've just been oiling up the top-buggy, and I thought maybe if you"—

"Why, certainly," interrupted Palmerston, responding amiably to the suggestion of John's manner; "if you think the young lady will not object, I shall be delighted. What time is the train due?"

"Now, that 's just what I told Emeline," said John triumphantly. "He 'd liever go

than not, says I; if he would n't then young folks has changed since I can remember. The train gets there about two o'clock. If you jog along kind of comfortable you 'll be home before supper. If the girl 's as smart as her father, you 'll have a real nice visit."

Mrs. Dysart viewed the matter with a pessimism which was scarcely to be distinguished from conventionality.

"I think it 's a kind of an imposition, Mr. Palmerston," she said, as her boarder was about to start, "sendin' you away down there for a total stranger. It 's a good thing you 're not bashful. Some young men would be terribly put out. I 'm sure Jawn would 'a' been at your age. But my father would n't have sent a strange young man after one of his daughters — he knowed us too well. My, oh! just to think of it! I 'd have fell all in a heap."

Palmerston ventured a hope that the young lady would not be completely unnerved.

"Oh, I 'm not frettin' about *her*," said his

hostess. "I don't doubt she can take care of *her*self. If she 's like some of her folks, she 'll talk you blind."

Palmerston drove away to hide the smile that teased the corners of his mouth.

"The good woman has the instincts of a chaperon, without the traditions," he reflected, letting his smile break into a laugh. "Her sympathy is with the weaker sex when it comes to a personal encounter. We may need her services yet, who knows?"

Malaga was a flag-station, and the shed which was supposed to shelter its occasional passengers from the heat of summer and the rain of winter was flooded with afternoon sunshine. Palmerston drove into the square shadow of the shed roof, and set his feet comfortably upon the dashboard while he waited. He was not aware of any very lively curiosity concerning the young woman for whom he was waiting. That he had formed some nebulous hypothesis of vulgarity was evidenced by his whimsical hope that her prevailing atmosphere would not be musk; aggressive perfumery of some

sort seemed inevitable. He found himself wondering what trait in her father had led him to this deduction, and drifted idly about in the haze of heredity until the whistle of the locomotive warned him to withdraw his feet from their elevation and betake himself to the platform. Half a minute later the engine panted onward and the young man found himself, with uplifted hat, confronting a slender figure clad very much as he was, save for the skirt that fell in straight, dark folds to the ground.

"Miss Brownell?" inquired Palmerston smiling.

The young woman looked at him with evident surprise.

"Where is my father?" she asked abruptly.

"He was unable to come. He regretted it very much. I was so fortunate as to take his place. Allow me" — He stooped toward her satchel.

"Unable to come — is he ill?" pursued the girl, without moving.

"Oh, no," explained Palmerston hastily;

" he is quite well. It was something else — some matter of business."

" Business! " repeated the young woman, with ineffable scorn.

She turned and walked rapidly toward the buggy. Palmerston followed with her satchel. She gave him a preoccupied " Thank you " as he assisted her to a seat and shielded her dress with the shabby robe.

" Do you know anything about this business of my father's? " she asked as they drove away.

" Very little; it is between him and Mr. Dysart, with whom I am boarding. Mr. Dysart has mentioned it to me." The young man spoke with evident reluctance. His companion turned her clear, untrammeled gaze upon him.

" You need n't be afraid to say what you think. Of course it is all nonsense," she said bitterly.

Palmerston colored under her intent gaze, and smiled faintly.

" I have said what I think to Mr. Dysart.

Don't you really mean that I need not be afraid to say what *you* think?"

She was still looking at him, or rather at the place where he was. She turned a little more when he spoke, and regarded him as if he had suddenly materialized.

"I think it is all nonsense," she said gravely, as if she were answering a question. Then she turned away again and knitted her brows. Palmerston glanced covertly now and then at her profile, unwillingly aware of its beauty. She was handsome, strikingly, distinguishedly handsome, he said to himself; but there was something lacking. It must be femininity, since he felt the lack and was masculine. He smiled to think how much alike they must appear — he and this very gentlemanly young woman beside him. He thought of her soft felt hat and the cut of her dark-blue coat, and there arose in him a rigidly subdued impulse to offer her a cigar, to ask her if she had a daily paper about her, to — She turned upon him suddenly, her eyes full of tears.

"I am crying!" she exclaimed angrily. "How unspeakably silly!"

Palmerston's heart stopped with that nameless terror which the actual man always experiences when confronted by this phase of the ideal woman. He had been so serene, so comfortable, under the unexpected that there flashed into his mind a vague sense of injury that she should surprise him in this way with the expected. It was inconsiderate, inexcusable; then, with an inconsistency worthy of a better sex, he groped after an excuse for the inexcusable.

"You are very nervous — your journey has tired you — you are not strong," he pleaded.

"I am *not* nervous," insisted the young woman indignantly. "I have no nerves — I detest them. And I am quite as strong as you are." The young fellow winced. "It is not that. It is only because I cannot have my own way. I cannot make people do as I wish." She spoke with a heat that seemed to dry her tears.

Palmerston sank back and let the case go

by default. "If you like that view of it better" —

"I like the truth," the girl broke in vehemently. "I am so tired of talk! Why must we always cover up the facts with a lot of platitudes?"

"Oh, I don't know," said Palmerston lightly. "I suppose there ought to be a skeleton of truth under all we say, but one does n't need to rattle his bones to prove that he has them."

The girl laughed. Palmerston caught a glimpse of something reassuring in her laugh.

"It might not be cheerful," she admitted, "but it would be honest, and we might learn to like it. Besides, the truth is not always disagreeable."

"Would n't the monotony of candor appal us?" urged Palmerston. "Is n't it possible that our deceptions are all the individuality we have?"

"Heaven forbid!" said his companion curtly.

They drove on without speaking. The

young man was obstinately averse to breaking the silence, which, nevertheless, annoyed him. He had a theory that feminine chatter was disagreeable. Just why he should feel aggrieved that this particular young woman did not talk to him he could not say. No doubt he would have resented with high disdain the suggestion that his vanity had been covertly feeding for years upon the anxiety of young women to make talk for his diversion.

"Do you think my father has closed his agreement with this man of whom you were speaking — this Mr. Dysart?" asked Miss Brownell, returning to the subject as if they had never left it.

"I am very certain he has not; at least, he had not this morning," rejoined Palmerston.

"I wish it might be prevented," she said earnestly, with a note of appeal.

"I have talked with Dysart, but my arguments fail to impress him; perhaps you may be more successful."

Palmerston was aware of responding to

her tone rather than to her words. The girl shook her head.

"I can do nothing. People who have only common sense are at a terrible disadvantage when it comes to argument. I know it is all nonsense; but a great many people seem to prefer nonsense. I believe my father would die if he were reduced to bare facts."

"There is something in that," laughed Palmerston. "A theory makes a very comfortable mental garment, if it is roomy enough."

The young woman turned and glanced at him curiously, as if she could not divine what he was laughing at.

"They are like children — such people. My father is like a child. He does not live in the world; he cannot defend himself."

Palmerston's skepticism rushed into his face. The girl looked at him, and the color mounted to her forehead.

"You do not believe in him!" she broke out. "It cannot be — you cannot think — you do not know him!"

"I know very little of your father's theo-

ries, Miss Brownell," protested Palmerston. "You cannot blame me if I question them; you seem to question them yourself."

"His theories — I loathe them!" She spoke with angry emphasis. "It is not that; it is himself. I cannot bear to think that you — that any one" —

"Pardon me," interrupted Palmerston; "we were speaking of his theories. I have no desire to discuss your father."

He knew his tone was resentful. He found himself wondering whether it was an excess of egotism or of humility that made her ignore his personality.

"Why should we not discuss him?" she asked, turning her straightforward eyes upon him.

"Because" — Palmerston broke into an impatient laugh — "because we are not disembodied spirits; at least, I am not."

The girl gave him a look of puzzled incomprehension, and turned back to her own thoughts. That they were troubled thoughts her face gave abundant evidence. Palmerston waited curiously eager for some mani-

festation of social grace, some comment on the scenery which should lead by the winding path of young-ladyism to the Mecca of her personal tastes and preferences; should unveil that sacred estimate of herself which she so gladly shared with others, but which others too often failed to share with her.

"I wish you would tell me all you know about it," she said presently, "this proposition my father has made. He writes me very indefinitely, and sometimes it is hard for me to learn, even when I am with him, just what he is doing. He forgets that he has not told me."

The young man hesitated, weighing the difficulties that would beset him if he should attempt to explain his hesitation, seeing also the more tangible difficulties of evasion if she should turn her clear eyes upon him. It would be better for Dysart if she knew, he said to himself. They had made no secret of the transaction, and sooner or later she must hear of it from others, if not from her father. He yielded to the infection of her candor, and told her what she asked. She

listened with knitted brows and an introspective glance.

"Mr. Dysart might lose his work," she commented tentatively.

Palmerston was silent.

The girl turned abruptly. "Could he lose anything else?" The color swept across her face, and her voice had a half-pathetic menace in it.

"Every business arrangement is uncertain, contains a possibility of loss."

Palmerston was defiantly aware that he had not answered her question. He emphasized his defiance by jerking the reins.

"Don't!" said the girl reproachfully. "I think his mouth is tender."

"You like horses?" inquired the young man, with a sensation of relief.

She shook her head. "No; I think not. I never notice them except when they seem uncomfortable."

"But if you did n't like them you would n't care."

"Oh, yes, I should. I don't like to see anything uncomfortable."

Palmerston laughed. "You have made me very uncomfortable, and you do not seem to mind. I must conclude that you have not noticed it, and that conclusion hurts my vanity."

The young woman did not turn her head.

"I try to be candid," she said, "and I am always being misunderstood. I think I must be very stupid."

Her companion began to breathe more freely. She was going to talk of herself, after all. He was perfectly at home when it came to that.

"Not at all," he said graciously; "you only make the rest of us appear stupid. We are at a disadvantage when we get what we do not expect, and none of us expect candor."

"But if we tell the truth ourselves, I don't see why we should n't expect it from others."

"Oh, yes, if we ourselves tell the truth."

"I think you have been telling me the truth," she said, turning her steadfast eyes upon him.

"Thank you," said Palmerston lightly. "I hope my evident desire for approval does n't suggest a sense of novelty in my position."

Miss Brownell smiled indulgently, and then knitted her brows. "I am glad you have told me," she said; "I may not be able to help it, but it is better for me to know."

They were nearing the Dysart house, and Palmerston remembered that he had no definite instruction concerning the newcomer's destination.

"I think I will take her directly to her father's tent," he reflected, "and let Mrs. Dysart plan her own attack upon the social situation."

When he had done this and returned to his boarding-place, there was a warmth in the greeting of his worthy hostess which suggested a sense of his recent escape from personal danger.

"I 'm real glad to see you safe home, Mr. Palmerston," she said amply. "I don't wonder you look fagged; the ride through the dust was hard enough without having all

sorts of other things to hatchel you. I do hope you won't have that same kind of a phthisicky ketch in your breath that you had the other night after you overdone. I think it was mostly nervousness, and, dear knows, you 've had enough to make you nervous to-day. I told Jawn after you was gone that I 'd hate to be answerable for the consequences."

Two days later John Dysart came into Palmerston's tent, and drew a camp-stool close to the young man's side.

"I 'm in a kind of a fix," he said, seating himself and fastening his eyes on the floor with an air of profound self-commiseration. "You see, this girl of Brownell's she came up where I was mending the flume yesterday, and we got right well acquainted. She seems friendly. She took off her coat and laid it on a boulder, and we set down there in our shirt-sleeves and had quite a talk. I think she means all right, but she 's visionary. I can't understand it, living with a practical man like the professor. But you can't always tell. Now, there 's Emeline. Em-

eline means well, but she lets her prejudices run away with her judgment. I guess women generally do. But, someway, this girl rather surprised me. When I first saw her I thought she looked kind of reasonable; maybe it was her cravat — I don't know."

John shook his head in a baffled way. He had taken off his hat, and the handkerchief which he had spread over his bald crown to protect it from the flies drooped pathetically about his honest face.

"What did Miss Brownell say?" asked Palmerston, flushing a little.

John looked at him absently from under his highly colored awning. "The girl? Oh, she don't understand. She wanted me to be careful. I told her I 'd been careful all my life, and I was n't likely to rush into anything now. She thinks her father 's 'most too sanguine about the water, but she does n't understand the machine — I could see that. She said she was afraid I 'd lose something, and she wants me to back out right now. I 'm sure I don't know what to do. I want to treat everybody right."

"Including yourself, I hope," suggested Palmerston.

"Yes, of course. I don't feel quite able to give up all my prospects just for a notion; and yet I want to do the square thing by Emeline. It's queer about women — especially Emeline. I 've often thought if there was only men it would be easier to make up your mind; but still, I suppose we 'd ought n't to feel that way. They don't mean any harm."

John drew the protecting drapery from his head, and lashed his bald crown with it softly, as if in punishment for his seeming disloyalty.

"You could withdraw from the contract now without any great loss to Mr. Brownell," suggested Palmerston.

John looked at him blankly. "Why, of course he would n't lose anything; I 'd be the loser. But I have n't any notion of doing that. I 'm only wondering whether I ought to tell Emeline about the girl. You see, Emeline 's kind of impulsive, and she 's took a dead set against the girl because, you

see, she thinks,"—John leaned forward confidentially and shut one eye, as if he were squinting along his recital to see that it was in line with the facts,—"you see, she thinks—well, I don't know as I'd ought to take it on myself to say just what Emeline thinks, but I think she thinks—well, I don't know as I'd ought to say what I think she thinks, either; but you'd understand if you'd been married."

"Oh, I can understand," asserted the young man. "Mrs. Dysart's position is very natural. But I think you should tell her what Miss Brownell advises. There is no other woman near, and it will prove very uncomfortable for the young lady if your wife remains unfriendly toward her. You certainly don't want to be unjust, Dysart."

John shook his head dolorously over this extension of his moral obligations.

"No," he declared valiantly; "I want to be square with everybody; but I don't want to prejudice Emeline against the professor, and I'm afraid this would. You see, Emeline's this way—well, I don't know as I'd

ought to say just how Emeline is, but you know she 's an *awful good woman!*"

John leaned forward and gave the last three words a slow funereal emphasis which threatened his companion's gravity.

"Oh, I know," Palmerston broke out quickly; "Mrs. Dysart 's a good woman, and she 's a very smart woman, too; she has good ideas."

"Yes, yes; Emeline 's smart," John made haste to acquiesce; "she 's smart as far as she knows, but when she don't quite understand, then she 's prejudiced. I guess women are generally prejudiced about machinery ; they can't be expected to see into it: but still, if you think I 'd ought to tell her what this Brownell girl says, why, I 'm a-going to do it."

John got up with the air of a man harassed but determined, and went out of the tent.

The next afternoon Mrs. Dysart put on her beaded dolman and her best bonnet and panted through the tar-weed to call upon her new neighbor. Palmerston watched the good woman's departure, and awaited her return,

taunting himself remorselessly meanwhile for the curiosity which prompted him to place a decoy-chair near his tent door, and exulting shamefacedly at the success of his ruse when she sank into it with the interrogative glance with which fat people always commit themselves to furniture.

"Well, I 've been to see her, and I must say, for a girl that 's never found grace, she 's about the straightforwardest person I ever came across. I know I was prejudiced." Mrs. Dysart took off her bonnet, a sacred edifice constructed of cotton velvet, frowzy feathers, and red glass currants, and gazed at it penitentially. "That father of hers is enough to prejudice a saint. But the girl ain't to blame. I think she must have had a prayin' mother, though she says she does n't remember anything about her exceptin' her clothes, which does sound worldly."

Mrs. Dysart straightened out the varnished muslin leaves of her horticultural head-gear, and held the structure at arm's length with a sigh of gratified sense and troubled spirit.

"I invited her to come to the mothers'

meetin' down at Mrs. Stearns's in the wash with me next Thursday afternoon, and I 'm goin' to have her over to dinner some day when the old perfessor 's off on a tramp. I try to have Christian grace, but I can't quite go him, though I would like to see the girl brought into the fold."

Palmerston remembered the steadfast eyes of the wanderer, and wondered how they had met all this. His companion replaced the bonnet on her head, where it lurched a little, by reason of insufficient skewering, as she got up.

"Then you were pleased with Miss Brownell?" the young man broke out, rather senselessly, he knew — aware, all at once, of a desire to hear more.

Mrs. Dysart did not sit down.

"Yes," she said judicially; "for a girl without any bringin' up, and with no religious inflooences, and no mother and no father to speak of, I think she 's full as good as some that 's had more chances. I 've got to go and start a fire now," she went on, with an air of willingness but inability to

continue the subject. "There 's Jawn comin' after the milk-pail; I do wish he could be brought to listen to reason."

Palmerston watched the good woman as she labored down the path, her dusty skirts drawn close about her substantial ankles, and the beaded dolman glittering unfeelingly in the sun.

"I hope she has a sense of humor," he said to himself. Then he got up hastily, went into the tent, and brought out a letter, which he read carefully from the beginning to the signature scribbled in the upper corner of the first page — "Your own Bess." After that he sat quite still, letting his glance play with the mists of the valley, until Mrs. Dysart rang the supper-bell.

"If she has a sense of humor, how much she must enjoy her!" he said to himself, with the confusion of pronouns we all allow ourselves and view with such scorn in others.

When a man first awakes to the fact that he is thinking of the wrong woman, it is always with a comfortable sense of certainty that he

can change his attitude of mind by a slight effort of the will. If he does not make the effort, it is only because he is long past the necessity of demonstrating himself to himself, and not from any fickleness of fancy on his own part. It was in this comfortable state of certainty that Sidney Palmerston betook himself, a few days later, to the Brownell tent, armed with a photograph which might have been marked "Exhibit A" in the case which he was trying with himself before his own conscience. If there was in his determination to place himself right with Miss Brownell any trace of solicitude for the young woman, to the credit of his modesty be it said, he had not formulated it. Perhaps there was. A belief in the general overripeness of feminine affection, and a discreet avoidance of shaking the tree upon which it grows, have in some way become a part of masculine morals, and Sidney Palmerston was still young enough to take himself seriously.

Miss Brownell had moved a table outside the tent, and was bending over a map fastened to it by thumb-tacks.

"I am trying to find out what my father is doing," she said, looking straight into Palmerston's eyes without a word of greeting. "I suppose you know they are about to begin work on the tunnel."

The young man was beginning to be a trifle tired of the tunnel. "Dysart mentioned it yesterday," he said. "May I sit down, Miss Brownell?"

She gave a little start, and went into the tent for another chair. When she reappeared, Palmerston met her at the tent door and took the camp-chair from her hand.

"I want to sit here," he said willfully, turning his back toward the table. "I don't want to talk about the tunnel; I want to turn the conversation upon agreeable things — myself, for instance."

She frowned upon him smilingly, and put her hand to her cheek with a puzzled gesture.

"Have I talked too much about the tunnel?" she asked. "I thought something might be done to stop it."

Palmerston shook his head. "You have

done everything in your power. Dysart has been fairly warned. Besides, who knows?" he added rather flippantly. "They may strike a hundred inches of water, as your father predicts."

"I have not been objecting merely to rid myself of responsibility; I have never felt any. I only wanted — I hoped" — She stopped, aware of the unresponsive chill that always came at mention of her father. "I *know* he is honest."

"Of course," protested Palmerston, with artificial warmth; "and, really, I think the place for the work is well selected. I am not much of an engineer, but I went up the other day and looked about, and there are certainly indications of water. I" — he stopped suddenly, aware of his mistake.

The girl had not noticed it. "I wish I could make people over," she said, curling her fingers about her thumb, and striking the arm of her chair with the soft side of the resultant fist, after the manner of women.

Her companion laughed.

"Not every person, I hope; not this one,

at least." He drew the photograph from his breast pocket and held it toward her. She took it from him, and looked at it absently an instant.

"What a pretty girl!" she said, handing it back to him. "Your sister?"

The young man flushed. "No; my fiancée."

She held out her hand and took the card again, looking at it with fresh eyes.

"A *very* pretty girl," she said. "What is her name?"

"Elizabeth Arnold."

"Where does she live?"

Palmerston mentioned a village in Michigan. His companion gave another glance at the picture, and laid it upon the arm of the chair. The young man rescued it from her indifference with a little irritable jerk. She was gazing unconsciously toward the horizon.

"Don't you intend to congratulate me?" he inquired with a nettled laugh.

She turned quickly, flushing to her forehead. "Pardon me. I said she was very

pretty — I thought young men found that quite sufficient. I have never heard them talk much of girls in any other way. But perhaps I should have told you: I care very little about photographs, especially of women. They never look like them. They always make me think of paper dolls."

She halted between her sentences with an ungirlish embarrassment which Palmerston was beginning to find dangerously attractive.

"But the women themselves — you find them interesting?"

"Oh, yes; some of them. Mrs. Dysart, for instance. As soon as she learned I had no mother, she invited me to a mothers' meeting. I thought that very interesting."

"Very sensible, too. They are mostly childless mothers, and a sprinkling of motherless children will add zest to the assemblage."

They both laughed, and the young man's laugh ended in a cough. The girl glanced uneasily toward the bank of fog that was sweeping across the valley.

"Mr. Palmerston," she said, "the fog is driving in very fast, and it is growing quite damp and chilly. I think you ought to go home. Wait a minute," she added, hurrying into the tent and returning with a soft gray shawl. "I am afraid you will be cold; let me put this about your shoulders."

She threw it around him and pinned it under his chin, standing in front of him with her forehead on a level with his lips.

"Now hurry!"

A man does not submit to the humiliation of having a shawl pinned about his shoulders without questioning his own sanity, and some consciousness of this fact forced itself upon Palmerston as he made his way along the narrow path through the greasewood. He had removed the obnoxious drapery, of course, and was vindicating his masculinity by becoming very cold and damp in the clammy folds of the fog which had overtaken him; but the shawl hung upon his arm and reminded him of many things — not altogether unpleasant things, he would have been obliged to confess if he had not been busy

assuring himself that he had no confession to make. He had done his duty, he said to himself; but there was something else which he did not dare to say even to himself — something which made him dissatisfied with his duty now that it was done. Of course he did not expect her to care about his engagement, but she should have been sympathetic; well-bred women were always sympathetic, he argued, arriving at his conclusion by an unanswerable transposition of adjectives. He turned his light coat collar up about his throat, and the shawl on his arm brushed his cheek warmly. No man is altogether color-blind to the danger-signals of his own nature. Did he really want her to care, after all? he asked himself angrily. He might have spared himself the trouble of telling her. She was absorbed in herself, or, what was the same, in that unsavory fraud whom she called father. The young man unfastened the flap of his tent nervously, and took himself in out of the drenching mist, which seemed in some way to have got into his brain. He was angry with himself for his interest in these peo-

ple, as he styled them in his lofty self-abasement. They were ungrateful, unworthy. His eye fell upon two letters propped up on his table in a manner so conspicuous as to suggest a knowledge of his preoccupation — as if some one were calling him out of his reverie in an offensively loud voice. He turned the address downward, and busied himself in putting to rights the articles which John had piled up to attract his tardy notice. He would read his letters, of course, but not in his present mood: that would be a species of sacrilege, he patronizingly informed his restive conscience.

And he did read them later, after he had carefully folded the gray shawl and placed it out of his range of vision — half a score of closely written pages filled with gentle girlish analysis of the writer's love and its unique manifestations, and ending with a tepid interest in the "queer people" among whom her lover's lot was cast. "It is very hard, my dear," she wrote, "to think of you in that lonely place, cut off from everybody and everything interesting; but we must bear it

bravely, since it is to make you strong and well."

Palmerston held the letter in his hand, and looked steadily through the tent window across the sea of fog that had settled over the valley.

"After all, she is not selfish," he reflected; "she has nothing to gain by saving Dysart, except" — he smiled grimly — "her rascally father's good name."

The rains were late, but they came at last, blowing in soft and warm from the south-east, washing the dust from the patient orange-trees and the draggled bananas, and luring countless green things out of the brown mould of the mesa into the winter sun. Birds fledged in the golden drought of summer went mad over the miracles of rain and grass, and riotously announced their discovery of a new heaven and a new earth to their elders. The leafless poinsettia flaunted its scarlet diadem at Palmerston's tent door, a monarch robbed of all but his crown, and the acacias west of the

Dysart dooryard burst into sunlit yellow in a night.

The rains had not been sufficient to stop work on the tunnel, and John watched its progress with the feverish eagerness of an inexperienced gambler. Now that it was fairly under way, Brownell seemed to lose interest in the result, and wandered, satchel in hand, over the mountain-side, leaving fragments of his linen duster on the thorny chaparral, and devising new schemes for the enrichment of the valley, to which his daughter listened at night in skeptical silence. Now and then his voice fell from some overhanging crag in a torrent of religious rapture, penetrating the cabin walls and trying Mrs. Dysart's pious soul beyond endurance.

"Now listen to that, Emeline!" said John, exultantly, during one of these vocal inundations. "He 's a-singin' the doxology. Now *I* believe he 's a Christian."

Mrs. Dysart averted her face with a sigh of long-suffering patience.

"Singin' is the easiest part of the Christian religion, Jawn. As for that,"—she

jerked her head toward the source of vocal supply, — "it 's soundin' brass; that 's what I 'd say if I was settin' in judgment, which I thank our heavenly Fawther I 'm not."

"Well, there goes Mr. Palmerston and the girl, anyway," said John, with eager irrelevance; "they seem to be gettin' pretty thick."

Mrs. Dysart moved toward the open window with piously restrained curiosity.

"I 'm sorry for that girl," she said; "she 's got one man more 'n she can manage now, without tacklin' another."

"Oh, well, now, Emeline, young folks, will be young folks, you know." There was in John's voice something dangerously near satisfaction with this well-known peculiarity of youth.

"Yes; and they 'll be old folks, too, which most of 'em seems to forget," returned Mrs. Dysart, sending a pessimistic glance after the retreating couple.

Mrs. Dysart was right. Sidney Palmerston and his companion were not thinking of old age that winter day. The mesa stretched a mass of purple lupine at their feet. There

was the odor of spring, the warmth of summer, the languor of autumn, in the air. As they neared the cañon the path grew narrow, and the girl walked ahead, turning now and then, and blocking the way, in the earnestness of her speech. They had long since ceased to talk of the tunnel; Sidney had ceased even to think of it. For weeks he had hardly dared to think at all. There had been at first the keen sense of disappointment in himself which comes to every confident soul as it learns the limitations of its own will; then the determination, so easy to youth's foreshortening view, to keep the letter of his promise and bury the spirit out of his own sight and the sight of the world forever; then the self-pity and the pleading with fate for a little happiness as an advance deposit on the promise of lifelong self-sacrifice; then the perfumed days when thought was lulled and duty became a memory and a hope. Strangely enough, it was always duty, this unholy thing which he meant to do — this payment of a debt in base metal, when the pure gold of love had been promised. But ethics counted

for little to-day as he followed a figure clad in blue serge down the path that led from the edge of the cañon to the bed of the stream. Budding willows made a green mist in the depths below them, and the sweet, tarry odors of the upland blew across the tops of the sycamores in the cañon and mingled with the smell of damp leaf-mould and the freshness of growing things.

The girl paused and peered down into the cañon inquiringly.

"Do you think of leaping?" asked Palmerston.

She smiled seriously, still looking down. "No; I was wondering if the rainfall had been as light in the mountains as it has been in the valley, and how the water-supply will hold out through the summer if we have no more."

Palmerston laughed. "Do you always think of practical things?" he asked.

She turned and confronted him with a half-defiant, half-whimsical smile.

"I do not think much about what I think," she said; "I am too busy thinking."

As she spoke she took a step backward and tripped upon some obstacle in the path.

Palmerston sprang forward and caught her upraised arm with both hands.

"I — I — love you!" he said eagerly, tightening his grasp, and then loosening it, and falling back with the startled air of one who hears a voice when he thinks himself alone.

The young woman let her arm fall at her side, and stood still an instant, looking at him with untranslatable eyes.

"You love me?" she repeated with slow questioning. "How can you?"

Palmerston smiled rather miserably. "Far more easily than I can explain why I have told you," he answered.

"If it is true, why should you not tell me?" she asked, still looking at him steadily.

Evasion seemed a drapery of lies before her gaze. Palmerston spoke the naked truth:

"Because I cannot ask you to love me in return — because I have promised to marry another woman, and I must keep my promise."

He made the last avowal with the bitter triumph of one who chooses death where he might easily have chosen dishonor.

His listener turned away a little, and looked through the green haze of the cañon at the snow of San Antonio.

"You say that you love me, and yet you intend to marry this other girl, who loves you, and live a lie?" she asked without looking at him.

"My God! but you make it hard!" groaned Palmerston.

She faced about haughtily.

"I make it hard!" she exclaimed. "I have been afraid of you — not for myself, but for — for others, about something in which one might be mistaken. And you come to me and tell me this! You would cheat a woman out of her life, a girl who loves you — who promised to marry you because you told her you loved her; who no doubt learned to love you because of your love for her. And this is what men call honor! Do you know what I intend to do? I intend to write to this girl and tell her

what you have told me. Then she may marry you if she wishes. But she shall know. You shall not feed her on husks all her life, if I can help it. And because I intend to do this, even if — even if I loved you, I could never see you again!"

Palmerston knew that he stood aside to let her pass and walk rapidly out of the cañon.

The call of insects and the twitter of linnets seemed to deepen into a roar. A faint "halloo" came from far up the mountainside, and in the distance men's voices rang across the cañon.

A workman came running down the path, almost stumbling over Palmerston in his haste.

"Where 's the old man — where 's Dysart?" he panted, wiping his forehead with his sleeve. "We 've struck a flow that 's washing us into the middle of next week. The old professor made a blamed good guess this time, sure."

Marg'et Ann

Marg'et Ann

IT was sacrament Sabbath in the little Seceder congregation at Blue Mound. Vehicles denoting various degrees of prosperity were beginning to arrive before the white meeting-house that stood in a patch of dog-fennel by the roadside.

The elders were gathered in a solemn, bareheaded group on the shady side of the building, arranging matters of deep spiritual portent connected with the serving of the tables. The women entered the church as they arrived, carrying or leading their fat, sunburned, awe-stricken children, and sat in subdued and reverent silence in the unpainted pews. There was a smell of pine and peppermint and last week's gingerbread in the room, and a faint rustle of bonnet strings and silk mantillas as each newcomer moved down the aisle; but there was no turning of heads or vain, indecorous curiosity concerning

arrivals on the part of those already in the pews.

Outside, the younger men moved about slowly in their creased black clothes, or stood in groups talking covertly of the corn planting which had begun; there was an evident desire to compensate by lowered voices and lack of animated speech for the manifest irreverence of the topic.

Marg'et Ann and her mother came in the farm wagon, that the assisting minister, the Rev. Samuel McClanahan, who was to preach the "action sermon," might ride in the buggy with the pastor. There were four wooden chairs in the box of the wagon, and the floor was strewn with sweet-scented timothy and clover. Mrs. Morrison and Miss Nancy McClanahan, who had come with her brother from Cedar Township to communion, sat in two of the chairs, and Marg'et Ann and her younger sister occupied the others. One of the boys sat on the high spring seat with his brother Laban, who drove the team, and the other children were distributed on the hay between their elders.

Marg'et Ann wore her mother's changeable silk made over and a cottage bonnet with pink silk strings and skirt and a white ruche with a wreath of pink flowers in the face trimming. Her brown hair was combed over her ears like a sheet of burnished bronze and held out by puff combs, and she had a wide embroidered collar, shaped like a halo, fastened by a cairngorm in a square setting of gold.

Miss Nancy McClanahan and her mother talked in a subdued way of the Fast Day services, and of the death of Squire Davidson, who lived the other side of the creek, and the probable result of Esther Jane Skinner's trouble with her chest. There was a tacit avoidance of all subjects pertaining to the flesh except its ailments, but there was no long-faced hypocrisy in the tones or manner of the two women. Marg'et Ann listened to them and watched the receding perspective of the corn rows in the brown fields. She had her token tied securely in the corner of her handkerchief, and every time she felt it she thought regretfully of Lloyd Archer.

She had hoped he would make a confession of faith this communion, but he had not come before the session at all. She knew he had doubts concerning close communion, and she had heard him say that certain complications of predestination and free will did not appear reasonable to him. Marg'et Ann thought it very daring of him to exact reasonableness of those in spiritual high places. She would as soon have thought of criticising the Creator for making the sky blue instead of green as for any of His immutable decrees as set forth in the Confession of Faith. It did not prevent her liking Lloyd Archer that her father and several of the elders whom he had ventured to engage in religious discussion pronounced him a dangerous young man, but it made it impossible for her to marry him. So she had been quite anxious that he should see his way clear to join the church.

They had talked about it during intermission last Sabbath; but Marg'et Ann, having arrived at her own position by a process of complete self-abnegation, found it hard to know how to proceed with this stalwart sin-

ner who insisted upon understanding things. It is true he spoke humbly enough of himself, as one who had not her light, but Marg'et Ann was quite aware that she did not believe the Catechism because she understood it. She had no doubt it could be understood, and she thought regretfully that Lloyd Archer would be just the man to understand it if he would study it in the right spirit. Just what the right spirit was she could not perhaps have formulated, except that it was the spirit that led to belief in the Catechism. She had hoped that he would come to a knowledge of the truth through the ministrations of the Rev. Samuel McClanahan, who was said to be very powerful in argument; but he had found fault with Mr. McClanahan's logic on Fast Day in a way that was quite disheartening, and he evidently did not intend to come forward this communion at all. Her father had spoken several times in a very hopeless manner of Lloyd's continued resistance of the Holy Spirit, and Marg'et Ann thought with a shiver of Squire Atwater, who was an infidel,

and was supposed by some to have committed the unpardonable sin. She remembered once when she and one of the younger boys had gone into his meadow for wild strawberries he had come out and talked to them in a jovial way, and when they were leaving, had patted her little brother's head, and told him, with a great, corpulent laugh, to "ask his father how the devil could be chained to the bottomless pit." She did not believe Lloyd could become like that, but still it was dangerous to resist the Spirit.

Miss Nancy McClanahan had a bit of mint between the leaves of her psalm-book, and she smelled it now and then in a niggardly way, as if the senses should be but moderately indulged on the Sabbath. She had on black netted mitts which left the enlarged knuckles of her hands exposed, and there was a little band of Guinea gold on one of her fingers, with two almost obliterated hearts in loving juxtaposition. Marg'et Ann knew that she had been a hardworking mother to the Rev. Samuel's family ever since the death of his wife, and she wondered vaguely how it

would seem to take care of Laban's children in case Lloyd should fail to make his peace with God.

When they drove to the door of the meeting-house, Archibald Skinner came down the walk to help them dismount. Mrs. Morrison shook hands with him kindly and asked after his sister's cough, and whether his Grandfather Elliott was still having trouble with his varicose veins. She handed the children to him one by one, and he lifted them to the ground with an easy swing, replacing their hats above their tubular curls after the descent, and grinning good-naturedly into their round, awe-filled, freckled countenances.

Miss Nancy got out of the wagon backwards, making a maidenly effort to keep the connection between the hem of her black silk skirt and the top of her calf-skin shoes inviolate, and brushing the dust of the wagon wheel from her dress carefully after her safe arrival in the dog-fennel. Marg'et Ann ignored the chair which had been placed beside the wagon for the convenience of her elders, and sprang from the wheel, placing

her hands lightly in those of the young man, who deposited her safely beside her mother and turned toward her sister Rebecca with a blush that extended to the unfreckled spaces of his hairy, outstretched hands, and explained his lively interest in the disembarkation of the family.

Laban drove the team around the corner to a convenient hitching-place, and the women and children went up the walk to the church door. Mrs. Morrison stopped a moment on the step to remove the hats of the younger boys, whose awe of the sanctuary seemed to have deprived them of volition, and they all proceeded down the aisle to the minister's pew.

The pastor and the Rev. Samuel McClanahan were already in the pulpit, their presence there being indicated by two tufts of hair, one black and the other sandy, which arose above the high reading-desk; and the elders having filed into the room and distributed themselves in the ends of the various well-filled pews, the young men and boys followed their example, the latter taking a

sudden start at the door and projecting themselves into their places with a concentration of purpose that seemed almost apoplectic in its results.

There was a deep, premonitory stillness, broken only by the precentor, who covertly struck his tuning-fork on the round of his chair, and held it to his ear with a faint, accordant hum; then the minister arose and spread his hands in solemn invocation above the little flock.

"Let us pray."

Every one in the house arose. Even old Mrs. Groesbeck, who had sciatica, allowed her husband and her son Ebenezer to assist her to her feet, and the children who were too small to see over the backs of the pews slipped from their seats and stood in downcast stillness within the high board inclosures.

After the prayer, Mr. Morrison read the psalm. It was Rouse's version: —

"I joy'd when to the house of God,
Go up, they said to me.
Jerusalem, within thy gates
Our feet shall standing be.

Jerus'lem as a city is
Compactly built together.
Unto that place the tribes go up,
The tribes of God go thither."

The minister read it all and "lined out" the first couplet. Then the precentor, a tall, thin man, whose thinness was enveloped but not alleviated by an alpaca coat, struck his tuning-fork more openly and launched into the highly rarefied atmosphere of "China," being quite alone in his vocal flight until the congregation joined him in the more accessible regions of the second line.

Marg'et Ann shared her psalm-book with Laban, who sat beside her. He had hurt his thumb shelling seed corn, and his mother had made him a clean thumb-stall for Sabbath. It was with this shrouded member that he held the edge of the psalm-book awkwardly. Laban's voice was in that uncertain stage in which its vagaries astonished no one so much as its owner, but he joined in the singing. "Let all the people praise Thee" was a command not to be lightly set aside for worldly considerations of harmony

and fitness, and so Laban sang, his callow and ill-adjusted soul divided between fears that the people would hear him and that the Lord would not.

Marg'et Ann listened for Lloyd Archer's deep bass voice in the Amen corner.

She wished his feet *were* standing within the gates of Jerusalem, as he so resonantly announced that they would be. But whatever irreverence there might be in poor Laban refusing to sing what he did not dream of doubting, there was no impiety to these devout souls in Lloyd Archer's joining with them in the vocal proclamation of things concerning which he had very serious doubts.

Not that Jerusalem, either new or old, was one of these things; the young man himself was not conscious of any heresy there; he believed in Jerusalem, in the church militant upon earth and triumphant in heaven, and in many deeper and more devious theological doctrines as well. Indeed, his heterodoxy was of so mild a type that, viewed by the incandescent light of to-day, which is not half

a century later, it shines with the clear blue radiance of flawless Calvinism.

If the tedious "lining out," traditionally sacred, was quite unreasonable and superfluous, commemorating nothing but the days of hunted Covenanters and few psalm-books and fewer still who were able to read them, perhaps the remembrance of these things was as conducive to thankfulness of heart as David's recital of the travails and triumphs of ancient Israel. Certain it is that profound gratitude to God and devotion to duty characterized the lives of most of these men and women who sang the praises of their Maker in this halting and unmusical fashion.

Marg'et Ann sang in a high and somewhat nasal treble, compassing the extra feet of Mr. Rouse's doubtful version with skill, and gliding nimbly over the gaps in prosody by the aid of his dextrously elongated syllables.

Some of the older men seemed to dwell upon these peculiarities of versification as being distinctively ecclesiastical and therefore spiritually edifying, and brought up the musical rear of such couplets with long-

drawn and profoundly impressive "shy-un's" and "i-tee's;" but these irregularities found little favor in the eyes of the younger people, who had attended singing-school and learned to read buckwheat notes under the direction of Jonathan Loomis, the precentor.

Marg'et Ann listened to the Rev. Mr. McClanahan's elaborately divided discourse, wondering what piece of the logical puzzle Lloyd would declare to be missing; and she glanced rather wistfully once or twice toward the Amen corner where the young man sat, with his head thrown back and his eager eyes fixed upon the minister's face.

When the intermission came, she ate her sweet cake and her triangle of dried apple pie with the others, and then walked toward the graveyard behind the church. She knew that Lloyd would follow her, and she prayed for grace to speak a work in season.

The young man stalked through the tall grass that choked the path of the little inclosure until he overtook her under a blossoming crab-apple tree.

He had been "going with" Marg'et Ann

more than a year, and there was generally supposed to be an understanding between them.

She turned when he came up, and put out her hand without embarrassment, but she blushed as pink as the crab-apple bloom in his grasp.

They talked a little of commonplace things, and Marg'et Ann looked down and swallowed once or twice before she said gravely, —

"I hoped you 'd come forward this sacrament, Lloyd."

The young man's brow clouded.

"I 've told you I can't join the church without telling a lie, Marg'et Ann. You would n't want me to tell a lie," he said, flushing hotly.

She shook her head, looking down, and twisting her handkerchief into a ball in her hands.

"I know you have doubts about some things; but I thought they might be removed by prayer. Have you prayed earnestly to have them removed?" She looked up at him anxiously.

"I 've asked to be made to see things right," he replied, choking a little over this unveiling of his holy of holies; "but I don't seem to be able to see some things as you do."

She pondered an instant, looking absently at the headstone of "Hephzibah," who was the later of Robert McCoy's two beloved wives, then she said, with an effort, for these staid descendants of Scottish ancestry were not given to glib talking of sacred things:

"I suppose doubts are sent to try our faith; but we have the promise that they will be removed if we ask in the right spirit. Are you sure you have asked in the right spirit, Lloyd?"

"I have prayed for light, but I have n't asked to have my doubts removed, Marg'et Ann; I don't know that I want to believe what does n't appear reasonable to me."

The girl lifted a troubled, tremulous face to his.

"That is n't the right spirit, Lloyd, — you know it is n't. How can God remove your doubts if you don't want him to?"

The young man reached up and broke off

a twig of the round, pink crab-apple buds and rolled the stem between his work-hardened hands.

"I 've asked for light," he repeated, "and if when it comes I see things different, I 'll say so; but I can't want to believe what I don't believe, and I can't pray for what I don't want."

The triangle of Marg'et Ann's brow between her burnished satin puffs of hair took on two upright, troubled lines. She unfolded her handkerchief nervously, and her token fell with a ringing sound against tired Hephzibah's gravestone and rolled down above her patiently folded hands.

Lloyd stooped and searched for it in the grass. When he found it he gave it to her silently, and their hands met. Poor Marg'et Ann! No hunted Covenanter amid Scottish heather was more a martyr to his faith than this rose-cheeked girl amid Iowa cornfields. She took the bit of flattened lead and pressed it between her burning palms.

"I hope you won't get hardened in unbelief, Lloyd," she said soberly.

The congregation was drifting toward the church again, and the young people turned. Lloyd touched the iridescent silk of her wide sleeve.

"You ain't a-going to let this make any difference between you and me, are you, Marg'et Ann?" he pleaded.

"I don't know," wavered the girl. "I hope you 'll be brought to a sense of your true condition, Lloyd." She hesitated, smoothing the sheen of her skirt. "It would be an awful cross to father and mother."

The young man fell behind her in the narrow path, and they walked to the church door in unhappy silence.

Inside, the elders had accomplished the spreading of the tables with slow-moving, awkward reverence. The spotless drapery swayed a little in the afternoon breeze, and there was a faint fruity smell of communion wine in the room.

The two ministers and some of the older communicants sat with bowed heads, in deep spiritual isolation.

The solemn stillness of self-examination

pervaded the room, and Marg'et Ann went to her seat with a vague stirring of resentment in her heart toward the Rev. Samuel McClanahan, who, with all his learning, could not convince this one lost sheep of the error of his theological way. She put aside such thoughts, however, before the serving of the tables, and walked humbly down the aisle behind her mother, singing the one hundred and sixteenth psalm to the quaint rising and falling cadences of "Dundee."

Once, while the visiting pastor addressed the communicants, she thought how it would simplify matters if Lloyd were sitting opposite her, and then caught her breath as the minister adjured each one to examine himself, lest eating and drinking unworthily he should eat and drink damnation to himself.

It was almost sunset when the service ended, and as the Morrisons drove into the lane the smell of jimson-weed was heavy on the evening air, and they could hear the clank of the cow bells in the distance.

Marg'et Ann went to her room to lay aside her best dress and get ready for the milking,

and Mrs. Morrison and Rebecca made haste to see about supper.

Miss Nancy McClanahan walked about the garden in her much made-over black silk, and compared the progress of Mrs. Morrison's touch-me-nots and four-o'clocks with her own, nipping herself a sprig of tansy from the patch under the Bowerly apple-tree.

She shared Marg'et Ann's room that night, and after she had taken off her lace head-dress and put a frilled nightcap over her lonesome little knot of gray hair and said her prayers, she composed herself on her pillow with a patient sigh, and lay watching Marg'et Ann crowd her burnished braids into her close-fitting cap without speaking; but after the light was out, and her companion had lain down beside her, the old maid placed her knotted hand on the girl's more shapely one, and said: —

"There 's worse things than living single, Marg'et Ann, and then again I suppose there 's better. Of course every girl has her chances, and the people we make sacrifices for don't always seem quite as grateful as we

calculated they 'd be. I 'm not repinin', but I sometimes think if I had my life to live over again I 'd do different."

Marg'et Ann pressed the knotted fingers, that felt like a handful of hickory nuts, and touched the little circle with its two worn-out hearts, but she said nothing.

She had heard that the Rev. Samuel McClanahan was going to marry the youngest Groesbeck girl, now that his children were "getting well up out of the way," and she knew that her mother had been telling Miss Nancy something about her own love affair with Lloyd Archer.

Whatever Mrs. Morrison may have confided to Miss Nancy McClanahan concerning Marg'et Ann and her lover must have been entirely suppositional and therefore liable to error; for the confidence between parent and child did not extend into the mysteries of love and marriage, nor would the older woman have dreamed of intruding upon the sacred precinct of her daughter's feelings toward a young man. She had remarked once or twice to her husband that she was

afraid sometimes that there was something between Lloyd Archer and Marg'et Ann; but whether this something was a barrier or a bond she left the worthy minister to divine.

That he had decided upon the latter was evidenced, perhaps, by his reply that he hoped not, and his fear, which he had expressed before, that Lloyd was getting more and more settled in habits of unbelief; and Mrs. Morrison took occasion to remark the next day in her daughter's hearing that she would hate to have a child of hers marry an unbeliever.

Marg'et Ann did not, however, need any of these helps to an understanding of her parents' position. She knew too well the danger that was supposed to threaten him who indulged in vain and unprofitable questionings, and she had too often heard the vanity of human reason proclaimed to feel any pride in the readiness with which Lloyd had answered Squire Wilson in the argument they had on foreordination at Hiram Graham's infare. Indeed, she had felt it a personal rebuke when her father had said on the way

home that he hoped no child of his would ever set up his feeble intellect against the eternal purposes of God, as Lloyd Archer was doing. Marg'et Ann knew perfectly well that if she married Lloyd in his present unregenerate state she would, in the estimation of her father and mother, be endangering the safety of her own soul, which, though presumably of the elect, could never be conclusively so proved until the gates of Paradise should close behind it.

She pondered on these things, and talked of them sometimes with Lloyd, rather unsatisfactorily, it is true; for that rising theologian bristled with questions which threw her troubled soul into a tumult of fear and uncertainty.

It was this latter feeling, perhaps, which distressed her most in her calmer moments; for it was gradually forcing itself upon poor Marg'et Ann that she must either snatch her lover as a brand from the burning or be herself drawn into the flames.

She had taken the summer school down on Cedar Creek, and Lloyd used to ride

down for her on Friday evenings when the creek was high.

Rebecca and Archie Skinner were to be married in the fall, and her mother, who had been ailing a little all summer, would need her at home when Rebecca was gone. Still, this would not have stood in the way of her marriage had everything else been satisfactory; and Lloyd suspected as much when she urged it as a reason for delay.

"If anybody has to stay at home on your mother's account, why not let Archie Skinner and Becky put off their wedding a while? They 're younger, and they have n't been going together near as long as we have," said Lloyd, in answer to her excuses.

They were riding home on horseback one Friday night, and Lloyd had just told her that Martin Prather was going back to Ohio to take care of the old folks, and would rent his farm very reasonably.

Marg'et Ann had on a slat sunbonnet which made her profile about as attractive as an "elbow" of stovepipe, but it had the advantage of hiding the concern that Lloyd's

questioning brought into her face. It could not, however, keep it out of her voice.

"I don't know, Lloyd," she began hesitatingly; then she turned toward him suddenly, and let him see all the pain and trouble and regret that her friendly headgear had been sheltering. "Oh, I *do* wish you could come to see things different!" she broke out tremulously.

The young man was quiet for an instant, and then said huskily, "I just thought you had something like that in your mind, Marg'et Ann. If you 've concluded to wait till I join the church we might as well give it up. I don't believe in close communion, and I can't see any harm in occasional hearing, and I have n't heard any minister yet that can reconcile free will and election; the more I think about it the less I believe; I think there is about as much hope of your changing as there is of me. I don't see what all this fuss is about, anyway. Arch Skinner is n't a church member!"

It was hard for Marg'et Ann to say why Archie Skinner's case was considered more

hopeful than Lloyd's. She knew perfectly well, and so did her lover, for that matter, but it was not easy to formulate.

"Ain't you afraid you 'll get to believing less and less if you go on arguing, Lloyd?" she asked, ignoring Archie Skinner altogether.

"I don't know," said Lloyd somewhat sullenly.

They were riding up the lane in the scant shadow of the white locust trees. The corn was in tassel now, and rustled softly in the fields on either side. There was no other sound for a while. Then Marg'et Ann spoke.

"I 'll see what father thinks" —

"No, you won't, Marg'et Ann," broke in Lloyd obstinately. "I think a good deal of your father, but I don't want to marry him; and I don't ask you to promise to marry the fellow I ought to be, or that you think I ought to be; I 've asked you to marry *me*. I don't care what you believe and I don't care what your father thinks; I want to know what *you* think."

Poor Lloyd made all this energetic avowal without the encouragement of a blush or a smile, or the discouragement of a frown or a tear. All this that a lover watches for anxiously was hidden by a wall of slats and green-checked gingham.

She turned her tubular head covering toward him presently, however, showing him all the troubled pink prettiness it held, and said very genuinely through her tears, —

"Oh, Lloyd, you know well enough what I think!"

They had reached the gate, and it was a very much mollified face which the young man raised to hers as he helped her to dismount.

"Your father and mother would n't stand in the way of our getting married, would they?" he asked, as she stood beside him.

"Oh, no, they would n't stand in the way," faltered poor Marg'et Ann.

How could she explain to this muscular fellow, whose pale-faced mother had no creed but what Lloyd thought or wanted or liked, that it was their unspoken grief that made it

hard for her? How shall any woman explain her family ties to any man?

Marg'et Ann did not need to consult her father. He looked up from his writing when she entered the door.

"Was that Lloyd Archer, Marg'et Ann?" he asked kindly.

"Yes, sir."

"I'd a little rather you would n't go with him. He seems to be falling into a state of mind that is likely to end in infidelity. It troubles your mother and me a good deal."

Marg'et Ann went into the bedroom to take off her riding skirt, and she did not come out until she was sure no one could see that she had been crying.

Mrs. Morrison continued to complain all through the fall; at least so her neighbors said, although the good woman had never been known to murmur; and Marg'et Ann said nothing whatever about her engagement to Lloyd Archer.

Late in October Archie Skinner and Rebecca were married and moved to the Martin Prather farm, and Lloyd, restless and chaf-

ing under all this silence and delay, had no longer anything to suggest when Marg'et Ann urged her mother's failing health as a reason for postponing their marriage.

Before the crab-apples bloomed again Mrs. Morrison's life went out as quietly as it had been lived. There was a short, sharp illness at the last, and in one of the pauses of the pain the sick woman lay watching her daughter, who was alone with her.

"I 'm real glad there was nothing between you and Lloyd Archer, Marg'et Ann," she said feebly; "that would have troubled me a good deal. You 'll have your father and the children to look after. Nancy Helen will be coming up pretty soon, and be some help; she grows fast. You 'll have to manage along as best you can."

The girl's sorely troubled heart failed her. Her eyes burned and her throat ached with the effort of self-control. She buried her face in the patchwork quilt beside her mother's hand. The woman stroked her hair tenderly.

"Don't cry, Marg'et Ann," she said, "don't cry. You 'll get on. It 's the Lord's will."

The evening after the funeral Lloyd Archer came over, and Marg'et Ann walked up the lane with him. She was glad to get away from the Sabbath hush of the house, which the neighbors had made so pathetically neat, — taking up the dead woman's task where she had left it, and doing everything with scrupulous care, as if they feared some vision of neglected duty might disturb her rest.

The frost was out of the ground and the spring plowing had begun. There was a smell of fresh earth from the furrows, and a red-bud tree in the thicket was faintly pink.

Lloyd was silent and troubled, and Marg'et Ann could not trust her voice. They walked on without speaking, and the dusk was deepening before they turned to go back. Marg'et Ann had thrown a little homespun shawl over her head, for there was a memory of frost in the air, but it had fallen back and Lloyd could see her profile with its new lines of grief in the dim light.

"It don't seem right, Marg'et Ann," he

began in a voice strained almost to coldness by intensity of feeling.

"But it *is* right, — we know that, Lloyd," interrupted the girl; then she turned and threw both arms about his neck and buried her face on his shoulder. "Oh, Lloyd, I can't bear it — I can't bear it alone — you must help me to be — to be — reconciled!"

The young man laid his cheek upon her soft hair. There was nothing but hot, unspoken rebellion in his heart. They stood still an instant, and then Marg'et Ann raised her head and drew the little shawl up and caught it under her quivering chin.

"We must go in," she said staidly, choking back her sobs.

Lloyd laid his hands on her shoulders and drew her toward him again.

"Is there no help, Marg'et Ann?" he said piteously, looking into her tear-stained face. In his heart he knew there was none. He had gone over the ground a thousand times since he had seen her standing beside her mother's open grave with the group of frightened children clinging to her.

"God is our refuge and our strength,
In straits a present aid;
Therefore, although the earth remove
We will not be afraid,"

repeated the girl, her sweet voice breaking into a whispered sob at the end. They walked to the step and stood there for a moment in silence.

The minister opened the door.

"Is that you, Marg'et Ann," he asked. "I think we 'd better have worship now; the children are getting sleepy."

Almost a year before patient, tireless Esther Morrison's eternal holiday had come, a man, walking leisurely along an empty mill-race, had picked up a few shining yellow particles, holding in his hand for an instant the destiny of half the world. Every restless soul that could break its moorings was swept westward on the wave of excitement that followed. Blue Mound felt the magnetism of those bits of yellow metal along with the rest of the world, and wild stories were told at singing-school and in harvest

fields of the fortunes that awaited those who crossed the plains.

Lloyd Archer, eager, restless, and discontented, caught the fever among the first. Marg'et Ann listened to his plans, heartsore and helpless. She had ceased to advise him. There was a tacit acknowledgment on her part that she had forfeited her right to influence his life in any way. As for him, unconsciously jealous of the devotion to duty that made her precious to him and unable to solve the problem himself, he yet felt injured that she could not be true to him and to his ideal of her as well. If she had left the plain path and gone with him into the byways, his heart would have remained forever with the woman he had loved, and not with the woman who had so loved him; and yet he sometimes urged her to do this thing, so strange a riddle is the "way of a man with a maid."

Lloyd had indulged a hope which he could not mention to any one, least of all to Marg'et Ann, that the minister would marry again in due season. But nothing pointed to

a fulfillment of this wish. The good man seemed far more interested in the abolition of slavery in the South than in the release of his daughter from bondage to her own flesh and blood, Lloyd said to himself, with the bitterness of youth. Indeed, the household had moved on with so little change in the comfort of its worthy head that a knowledge of Lloyd's wishes would have been quite as startling to the object of them as the young man's reasons for their indulgence.

The gold fever had seemed to the minister a moral disorder, calling for spiritual remedies, which he had not failed to administer in such quantity and of such strength as corresponded with the religious therapeutics of the day.

Marg'et Ann hinted of this when her lover came to her with his plans.

She was making soap, and although they stood on the windward side of the kettle, her eyes were red from the smoke of the hickory logs.

"Do you think it is just right, Lloyd?" she asked, stirring the unsavory concoction

slowly with a wooden paddle. "Is n't it just a greed for gold, like gambling?"

Lloyd put both elbows on the top of the ash hopper and looked at her laughingly. He had on a straw hat lined with green calico, and his trousers were of blue jeans, held up by "galluses" of the same; but he was a handsome fellow, with sound white teeth and thick curling locks.

"I don't know as a greed for gold is any worse than a greed for corn," he said, trying to curb his voice into seriousness.

"But corn is useful — it is food — and, besides, you work for it." Marg'et Ann pushed her sunbonnet back and looked at him anxiously.

"Well, I've planted a good deal more corn than I expect to eat this year, and I was calculating to sell some of it for gold, — you would n't think that was wrong, would you, Marg'et Ann?"

"No, of course not; but some one will eat it, — it's useful," maintained the girl earnestly.

"I have n't found anything more useful

than money yet," persisted the young man good-naturedly; "but if I come home from California with two or three bags full of gold, I'll buy up a township and raise corn by the wholesale, — that'll make it all right, won't it?"

Marg'et Ann laughed in spite of herself.

"You're such a case, Lloyd," she said, not without a note of admiration in her reproof.

When it came to the parting there was little said. Marg'et Ann hushed her lover's assurances with her own, given amid blinding tears.

"I'll be just the same, Lloyd, no matter what happens, but I can't let you make any promises; it would n't be right. I can't expect you to wait for me. You must do whatever seems right to you; but there won't be any harm in my loving you, — at least as long as you don't care for anybody else."

The young man said what a young man usually says when he is looking into trustful brown eyes, filled with tears he has caused and cannot prevent, and at the moment, in

the sharp pain of parting, the words of one were not more or less sincere than those of the other.

The years that followed moved slowly, weighted as they were with hard work and monotony for Marg'et Ann, and by the time the voice of the corn had changed three times from the soft whispering of spring to the hoarse rustling of autumn, she felt herself old and tired.

There had been letters and messages and rumors, more or less reliable, repeated at huskings and quiltings, to keep her informed of the fortunes of those who had crossed the plains, but her own letters from Lloyd had been few and unsatisfactory. She could not complain of this strict compliance with her wishes, but she had not counted upon the absence of her lover's mother, who had gone to Ohio shortly after his departure and decided to remain there with a married daughter. There was no one left in the neighborhood who could expect to hear directly from Lloyd, and the reports that came from other

members of the party he had joined told little that poor Marg'et Ann wished to know, beyond the fact that he was well and had suffered the varying fortunes of other gold-hunters.

There were moments of bitterness in which she tried to picture to herself what her life might have been if she had braved her parents' disapproval and married Lloyd before her mother's death; but there was never a moment bitter enough to tempt her into any neglect of present duty. The milking, the butter-making, the washing, the spinning, all the relentless hard work of the women of her day, went on systematically from the beginning of the year to its end, and the younger children came to accept her patient ministrations as unquestioningly as they had accepted their mother's.

She wondered sometimes at her own anxiety to know that Lloyd was true to her, reproaching herself meanwhile with puritanic severity for such unholy selfishness; but she discussed the various plaids for the children's flannel dresses with Mrs. Skinner,

who did the weaving, and cut and sewed and dyed the rags for a new best room carpet with the same conscientious regard for art in the distribution of the stripes which was displayed by all the women of her acquaintance; indeed, there was no one among them all whose taste in striping a carpet, or in "piecing and laying out a quilt," was more sought after than Marg'et Ann's.

"She always was the old-fashionedest little thing," said grandmother Elliott, who had been a member of Mr. Morrison's congregation back in Ohio. "I never did see her beat." The good old lady's remark, which was considered highly commendatory, and had nothing whatever to do with the frivolities of changing custom, was made at a quilting at Squire Wilson's, from which Marg'et Ann chanced to be absent.

"It 's a pity she don't seem to get married," said Mrs. Barnes, who was marking circles in the white patches of the quilt by means of an inverted teacup of flowing blue; "she 's the kind of a girl *I'd* 'a' thought young men would 'a' took up with."

"Marg'et Ann never was much for the boys," said grandmother Elliott, disposed to defend her favorite, "and dear knows she has her hands full; it 's quite a chore to look after all them children."

The women maintained a charitable silence. The ethics of their day did not recognize any womanly duty inconsistent with matrimony. "A disappointment" was considered the only dignified reason for remaining single. Grandmother Elliott felt the weakness of her position.

"I 'm sure I don't see how her father would get on," she protested feebly; "he ain't much of a hand to manage."

"If Marg'et Ann was to marry, her father would have to stir round and get himself a wife," said Mrs. Barnes, with cheerful lack of sentiment, confident that her audience was with her.

"I 've always had a notion Marg'et Ann thought a good deal more of Lloyd Archer than she let on, — at least more than her folks knew anything about," asserted Mrs. Skinner, stretching her plump arm under the

quilt and feeling about carefully. "I should n't wonder if she 'd had quite a disappointment."

"I would have hated to see her marry Lloyd Archer," protested grandmother Elliott; "she 's a sight too good for him; he 's always had queer notions."

"Well, I should 'a' thought myself she could 'a' done better," admitted Mrs. Barnes, "but somehow she has n't. I tell 'Lisha it 's more of a disgrace to the young man than it is to her."

Evidently this discussion of poor Marg'et Ann's dismal outlook matrimonially was not without precedent.

One person was totally oblivious to the facts and all surmises concerning them. Theoretically, no doubt, the good minister esteemed it a reproach that any woman should remain unmarried; but there are theories which refinement finds it easy to separate from daily life, and no thought of Marg'et Ann's future intruded upon her father's deep and daily increasing distress over the wrongs of human slavery. Marg'et Ann was conscious sometimes of a change in him; he

went often and restlessly to see Squire Kirkendall, who kept an underground railroad station, and not infrequently a runaway negro was harbored at the Morrisons'. Strange to say, these frightened and stealthy visitors, dirty and repulsive though they were, excited no fear in the minds of the children, to whom the slave had become almost an object of reverence.

Marg'et Ann read her first novel that year, — a story called "Uncle Tom's Cabin," which appeared in the "National Era," — read it and wept over it, adding all the intensity of her antislavery training to the enjoyment of a hitherto forbidden pleasure. She did not fail to note her father's eagerness for the arrival of the paper; and recalled the fact that he had once objected to her reading "Pilgrim's Progress" on the Sabbath.

"It 's useful, perhaps," he had said, "useful in its way and in its place, but it is fiction nevertheless."

There were many vexing questions of church discipline that winter, and the Rev. Samuel McClanahan rode over from Cedar

Township often and held long theological discussions with her father in the privacy of the best room. Once Squire Wilson came with him, and as the two visitors left the house Marg'et Ann heard the Rev. Samuel urging upon the elder the necessity of "holding up Brother Morrison's hands."

It was generally known among the congregation that Abner Kirkendall had been before the session for attending the Methodist Church and singing an uninspired hymn in the public worship of God, and it was whispered that the minister was not properly impressed with the heinousness of Abner's sin. Then, too, Jonathan Loomis, the precentor, who had at first insisted upon lining out two lines of the psalm instead of one, and had carried his point, now pushed his dangerous liberality to the extreme of not lining out at all. The first time he was guilty of this startling innovation, "Rushin' through the sawm," as Uncle John Turnbull afterwards said, "without deegnity, as if it were a mere human cawmposeetion," two or three of the older members arose and left the church;

and the presbytery was shaken to its foundations of Scotch granite when Mr. Morrison humbly acknowledged that he had not noticed the precentor's bold sally until Brother Turnbull's departure attracted his attention.

It is true that the minister had preached most acceptably that day from the ninth and twelfth verses of the thirty-fifth chapter of Job: "By reason of the multitude of oppressions they make the oppressed to cry: they cry out by reason of the arm of the mighty. . . . There they cry, but none giveth answer, because of the pride of evil men." And it is possible that the zeal for freedom that burned in his soul was rather gratified than otherwise by Jonathan's bold singing of the prophetic psalm: —

"He out of darkness did them bring
And from Death's shade them take,
Those bands wherewith they had been bound
Asunder quite he brake.

"O that men to the Lord would give
Praise for His goodness then,
And for His works of wonder done
Unto the sons of men."

But such absorbing enthusiasm, even in a good cause, argued a doctrinal laxity which could not pass unnoticed.

"A deegnifyin' of the creature above the Creator, the sign above the thing seegnified," Uncle Johnnie Turnbull urged upon the session, smarting from the deep theological wound he had suffered at Jonathan's hands.

A perceptible chill crept into the ecclesiastical atmosphere which Marg'et Ann felt without thoroughly comprehending.

Nancy Helen was sixteen now, and Marg'et Ann had taught the summer school at Yankee Neck, riding home every evening to superintend the younger sister's housekeeping.

Laban had emerged from the period of unshaven awkwardness, and was going to see Emeline Barnes with ominous regularity.

There was nothing in the affairs of the household to trouble Marg'et Ann but her father's ever increasing restlessness and preoccupation. She wondered if it would have been different if her mother had lived. There was no great intimacy between the father and

daughter, but the girl knew that the wrongs of the black man had risen like a dense cloud between her father and what had once been his highest duty and pleasure.

She was not, therefore, greatly surprised when he said to her one day, more humbly than he was wont to speak to his children: —

"I think I must try to do something for those poor people, child; it may not be much, but it will be something. The harvest truly is great, but the laborers are few."

"What will you do, father?"

Marg'et Ann asked the question hesitatingly, dreading the reply. The minister looked at her with anxious eagerness. He was glad of the humble acquiescence that obliged him to put his half-formed resolution into words.

"If the presbytery will release me from my charge here, I may go South for a while. Nancy Helen is quite a girl now, and with Laban and your teaching you could get on. They are bruised for our iniquities, Marg'et Ann, — they are our iniquities, indirectly, child."

He got up and walked across the rag-carpeted floor. Marg'et Ann sat still in her mother's chair, looking down at the stripes of the carpet, — dark blue and red and "hit or miss;" her mother had made them so patiently; it seemed as if patience were always under foot for heroism to tread upon. She fought with the ache in her throat a little. The stripes on the floor were beginning to blur when she spoke.

"Is n't it dangerous to go down there, father, for people like us, — for Abolitionists, I mean; I have heard that it was."

"Dangerous!" The preacher's face lighted with the faint, prophetic joy of martyrdom; poor Marg'et Ann had touched the wrong chord. "It cannot be worse for me than it is for them, — I must go," he broke out impatiently; "do not say anything against it, child!"

And so Marg'et Ann said nothing.

Really there was not much time for words. There were many stitches to be taken in the threadbare wardrobe, concerning which her father was as ignorant and indifferent as

a child, before she packed it all in the old carpet sack and nerved herself to see him start.

He went away willingly, almost cheerfully. Just at the last, when he came to bid the younger children good-by, the father seemed for an instant to rise above the reformer. No doubt their childish unconcern moved him.

"We must think of the families that have been rudely torn apart. Surely it ought to sustain us, — it ought to sustain us," he said to Laban as they drove away.

Two days later they carried him home, crippled for life by the overturning of the stage near Cedar Creek.

He made no complaint of the drunken driver whose carelessness had caused the accident and frustrated his plans; but once, when his eldest daughter was alone with him, he looked into her face and said, absently, rather than to her, —

"Patience, patience; I doubt not the Lord's hand is in it."

And Marg'et Ann felt that his purpose was not quenched.

In the spring Lloyd Archer came home. Marg'et Ann had heard of his coming, and tried to think of him with all the intervening years of care and trial added; but when she saw him walking up the path between the flowering almonds and snowball bushes, all the intervening years faded away, and left only the past that he had shared, and the present.

She met him there at her father's bedside and shook hands with him and said, "How do you do, Lloyd? Have you kept your health?" as quietly as she would have greeted any neighbor. After he had spoken to her father and the children she sat before him with her knitting, a very gentle, self-contained Desdemona, and listened while he told the minister stories of California, mentioning the trees and fruits of the Bible with a freedom and familiarity that savored just enough of heresy to make him seem entirely unchanged.

When Nancy Helen came into the room he glanced from her to Marg'et Ann; the two sisters had the same tints in hair and

cheek, but the straight, placid lines of the elder broke into waves and dimples in the younger. Nancy Helen shook hands in a limp, half-grown way, blushingly conscious that her sleeves were rolled up, and that her elders were maturely indifferent to her sufferings; and Lloyd jokingly refused to tell her his name, insisting that she had kissed him good-by and promised to be his little sweetheart when he came back.

Marg'et Ann was knitting a great blue and white sock for Laban, and after she had turned the mammoth heel she smoothed it out on her lap, painstakingly, conscious all the time of a tumultuous, unreasonable joy in Lloyd's presence, in the sound of his voice, in his glance, which assured her so unmistakably that she had a right to rejoice in his coming.

She did not see her lover alone for several days. When she did, he caught her hands and said, "Well, Marg'et Ann?" taking up the unsettled question of their lives where they had left it. And Marg'et Ann stood still, with her hands in his, looking down at

the snow of the fallen locust-bloom at her feet, and said, —

"When father is well enough to begin preaching again, then I think — perhaps — Lloyd" —

But Lloyd did not wait to hear what she thought, nor trouble himself greatly about the "perhaps."

The minister's injuries were slow to mend. They were all coming to understand that his lameness would be permanent, and there was on the part of the older children a tense, pained curiosity concerning their father's feeling on the subject, which no word of his had thus far served to relieve. There was a grave shyness among them concerning their deepest feelings, which was, perhaps, a sense of the inadequacy of expression rather than the austerity it seemed. Marg'et Ann would have liked to show her sympathy for her father, and no doubt it would have lightened the burdens of both; but any betrayal of filial tenderness beyond the dutiful care she gave him would have startled the

minister, and embarrassed them both. Life was a serious thing to them only by reason of its relation to eternity; a constant underrating of this world had made them doubtful of its dignity. Marg'et Ann felt it rather light-minded that she should have a lump in her throat whenever she thought of her father on crutches for the rest of his life. She wondered how Laban felt about it, but it was not likely that she would ever know. Laban had made the crutches himself, a rude, temporary pair at first, but he was at work on others now that were more carefully made and more durable; and she knew from this and the remarks of her father when he tried them that they both understood. It was not worth while to talk about it of course, and yet the household had a dull ache in it that a little talking might have relieved.

Marg'et Ann had begged Lloyd not to speak to her father until the latter was "up and about." It seemed to her unkind to talk of leaving him when he was helpless, and Lloyd was very patient now, and very tract-

able, working busily to get the old place in readiness for his bride.

Mr. Morrison sat at his table, reading, or writing hurriedly, or gazing absently out into the June sunshine. He was sitting thus one afternoon, tapping the arms of his chair nervously with his thin fingers, when Marg'et Ann brought her work and sat in her mother's chair near him. It was not very dainty work, winding a mass of dyed carpet rags into a huge, madder-colored ball, but there were delicate points in its execution which a restless civilization has hurried into oblivion along with the other lost arts, and Marg'et Ann surveyed her ball critically now and then, to be sure that it was not developing any slovenly one-sidedness under her deft hands. The minister's crutches leaned against the arm of his painted wooden chair with an air of mute but patient helpfulness. Marg'et Ann had cushioned them with patchwork, but he had walked about so much that she already noted the worn places beginning to show under the arms of his faded dressing-gown. He leaned forward a little and glanced

toward her, his hand on them now, and she put down her work and went to his side. He raised himself by the arms of his chair, sighing, and took the crutches from her patient hand.

"I am not of much account, child, — not of much account," he said wearily.

Marg'et Ann colored with pain. She felt as a branch might feel when the trunk of the tree snaps.

"I 'm sure you 're getting on very well, father; the doctor says you 'll be able to begin preaching again by fall."

The minister made his way slowly across the room and stood a moment in the open door; then he retraced his halting steps with their thumping wooden accompaniment and seated himself slowly and painfully again. One of the crutches slid along the arm of the chair and fell to the floor. Marg'et Ann went to pick it up. His head was still bowed and his face had not relaxed from the pain of moving. Standing a moment at his side and looking down at him, she noticed how thin and gray his hair had become. She

turned away her face, looking out of the window and battling with the cruelty of it all. The minister felt the tenderness of her silent presence there, and glanced up.

"I shall not preach any more, Marg'et Ann, at least not here, not in this way. If I might do something for those down-trodden people, — but that is perhaps not best. The Lord knows. But I shall leave the ministry for a time, — until I see my way more clearly."

His daughter crossed the room, stooping to straighten the braided rug at his feet as she went, and took up her work again. Certainly the crimson ball was a trifle one-sided, or was it the unevenness of her tear-filled vision? She unwound it a little to remedy the defect as her father went on.

"Things do not present themselves to my mind as they once did. I have not decided just what course to pursue, but it would certainly not be honorable for me to occupy the pulpit in my present frame of mind. You 've been a very faithful daughter, Marg'et Ann," he broke off, "a good daughter."

He turned and looked at her sitting there winding the great ball with her trembling fingers; her failure to speak did not suggest any coldness to either of them; response would have startled him.

"I have thought much about it," he went on. "I have had time to think under this affliction. Nancy Helen is old enough to be trusted now, and when Laban marries he will perhaps be willing to rent the land. No doubt you could get both the summer and winter schools in the district; that would be a great help. The congregation has not been able to pay much, but it would be a loss" —

He faltered for the first time; there was a shame in mentioning money in connection with his office.

"I have suffered a good deal of distress of mind, child, but doubtless it is salutary — it is salutary."

He reached for his crutches again restlessly, and then drew back, remembering the pain of rising.

Marg'et Ann had finished the ball of carpet rags and laid it carefully in the box with

the others. She had taken great pains with the coloring, thinking of the best room in her new home, and Lloyd had a man's liking for red.

And now the old question had come back; it was older than she knew. Doubtless it was right that men should always have opinions and aspirations and principles, and women only ties and duties and heartaches. It seemed cruel, though, just now. She choked back the throbbing pain in her throat that threatened to make itself seen and heard.

"Of course I must do right, Marg'et Ann."

Her father's voice seemed almost pleading.

Of course he must do right. Marg'et Ann had not dreamed of anything else. Only it was a little hard just now.

She glanced at him, leaning forward in his chair with the crutches beside him. He looked feeble about the temples, and his patched dressing-gown hung loose in wrinkles. She crossed the room and stood beside him. Of course she would stay with him. She did not ask herself why. She did not reason that it was because motherhood underlies wife-

hood and makes it sweet and sufficing; makes every good woman a mother to every dependent creature, be it strong or weak. I doubt if she reasoned at all. She only said, —

"Of course you will do right, father, and I will see about the school; I think I can get it. You must not worry; we shall get on very well."

Out in the June sunshine Lloyd was coming up the walk with Nancy Helen. She had been gathering wild strawberries in the meadow across the lane, and they had met at the gate. Her sunbonnet was pushed back from her crinkly hair, and her cheeks were stained redder than her finger-tips by Lloyd's teasing.

Marg'et Ann looked at them and sighed.

After her brother's return from presbytery Miss Nancy McClanahan borrowed her sister-in-law's horse and rode over to visit the Morrisons. It was not often that Miss Nancy made a trip of this kind alone, and Marg'et Ann ran down the walk to meet her, rolling down her sleeves and smoothing her hair.

Miss Nancy took the girl's soft cheeks in her hands and drew them into the shadow of her cavernous sunbonnet for a withered kiss.

"I want to see your father, Margie," she whispered, and the gentle constraint of spiritual things came into Marg'et Ann's voice as she answered, —

"He 's in the best room alone; I moved him in there this morning to be out of the sweeping. You can go right in."

She lingered a little, hoping her old friend's concern of soul might not have obscured her interest in the salt-rising bread, which had been behaving untowardly of late; but Miss Nancy turned her steps in the direction of the best room, and Marg'et Ann opened the door for her, saying, —

"It 's Miss McClanahan, father."

The minister looked up, wrinkling his forehead in the effort to disentangle himself from his thoughts. The old maid crossed the room toward him with her quick, hitching step.

"Don't try to get up, Joseph," she said,

as he laid his hand on his crutches; "I'll find myself a chair."

She sat down before him, crossing her hands in her lap. The little worn band of gold was not on her finger, but there was a smooth white mark where it had been.

"Samuel got home from presbytery yesterday; he told me what was before them. I thought I'd like to have a little talk with you."

Her voice trembled as she stopped. A faint color showed itself through the silvery stubble on the minister's cheeks; he patted the arms of his chair nervously.

"I'm hardly prepared to discuss my opinions. They are vague, very vague, at best. I should be sorry to unsettle the faith"—

"I don't care at all about your opinions," Miss Nancy interrupted, pushing his words away with both hands; "I only wanted to speak to you about Marg'et Ann."

"Marg'et Ann!" The minister's relief breathed itself out in gentle surprise.

"Yes, Marg'et Ann. I think it's time somebody was thinking of her, Joseph."

Miss Nancy leaned forward, her face the color of a withered rose. "She 's doing over again what I did. Perhaps it was best for you. I believe it was, and I don't want you to say a word, — you must n't, — but I can speak, and I 'm not going to let Marg'et Ann live my life if I can help it."

"I don't understand you, Nancy."

The minister laid his hands on his crutches and refused to be motioned back into his chair. He stood before her, looking down anxiously into her thin, eager face.

"I know you don't. Esther never understood, either. You did n't know that Marg'et Ann gave up Lloyd Archer because he had doubts, but I knew it. I wanted to speak then, but I could n't — to her — Esther, — and now you don't know that she 's going to give him up again because you have doubts, Joseph. That 's the way with women. They have no principles, only to do the hardest thing. But I know what it means to work and worry and pinch and have nothing in the end, not even troubles of your own, — they would be some comfort. And I 'm going to

save Marg'et Ann from it. I 'm going to come here and take her place. I 've got a little something of my own, you know; I always meant it for her."

She stopped, looking at him expectantly. The minister turned away, rubbing his hands up and down his polished crutches. There was a soft, troubled light in his eyes.

"Why, Nancy!"

His companion got up and moved a step backward. Her cheeks flushed a pale, faded red.

"Oh, no," she said, with a quick, impatient movement of her head, "not that, Joseph; that died years ago, — you are the same to me as other men, excepting that you are Marg'et Ann's father. It 's for *her*. It 's the only way I can live my life over again, by letting her live hers. I don't know that it will be any better; but she will know, she will have a certainty in place of a doubt. I don't know that my life would have been any better; I know yours would not, and anyway it 's all over now. I know I can get on with the children, and I don't think peo-

ple will talk. I hope you 're not going to object, Joseph. We 've always been very good friends."

He shook his head slowly.

"I don't see how I can, Nancy. It 's very good of you. Perhaps," he added, looking at her with a wistful desire for contradiction, — "perhaps I 've been a little selfish about Marg'et Ann."

"I don't think you meant to be, Joseph," said the old maid soothingly; "when anybody 's so good as Marg'et Ann, she does n't call for much grace in the people about her. I think it 's a duty we owe to other people to have some faults."

Outside the door Marg'et Ann still lingered, with her anxiety about the bread on her lips and the shadow of much serving in her soft eyes. Miss Nancy stopped and drew her favorite into the shelter of her gaunt arms.

"I 'm coming over next week to help you get ready for the wedding, Margie," she said, "and I 'm going to stay when you 're gone and look after things. They don't need me

at Samuel's now, and I 'll be more comfortable here. I 've got enough to pay a little for my board the rest of my life, and I don't mean to work very hard, but I can show Nancy Helen and keep the run of things. There, don't cry. We 'll go and look at the sponge now. I guess you 'd better ride over to Yankee Neck this afternoon, and tell them you don't want the winter school — There, there!"

At the Foot of the Trail

At the Foot of the Trail

I

THE slope in front of old Mosey's cabin was a mass of purple lupine. Behind the house the wild oats were dotted with brodiæa, waving on long, glistening stems. The California lilac was in bloom on the trail, and its clumps of pale blossoms were like breaks in the chaparral, showing the blue sky beyond.

In the corral between the house and the mountain-side stood a dozen or more burros, wearing that air of patient resignation common to very good women and very obstinate beasts. Old Mosey himself was pottering about the corral, feeding his stock. He stooped now and then with the unwillingness of years, and erected himself by slow, rheumatic stages. The donkeys crowded about the fence as he approached with a

forkful of alfalfa hay, and he pushed them about with the flat of the prongs, calling them by queer, inappropriate names.

A young man in blue overalls came around the corner of the house, swinging a newly trimmed manzanita stick.

"Hello, Mosey!" he called. "Here I am again, as hungry as a coyote. What's the lay-out? Cottontail on toast and patty de foy grass?"

The old man grinned, showing his worn, yellow teeth.

"I 'll be there in a minute," he said. "Just set down on the step."

The young fellow came toward the corral.

"I 've got a job on the trail," he said. "I 'm going down-town for my traps. Who named 'em for you?" he questioned, as the old man swore softly at the Democratic candidate for President.

"Oh, the women, mostly. They take a lot of interest in 'em when they start out; they 're afraid I ain't good to them. They don't say so much about it when they get back."

"They 're too tired, I suppose."

"Yes, I s'pose so."

"You let out five this morning, did n't you ? I met them on my way down. The girl in bloomers seemed to be scared; she gave a little screech every few minutes. The others did n't appear to mind."

"Oh, she was n't afraid. Women don't make a noise when they 're scared; it 's only when they want to scare somebody else."

The young fellow leaned against the fence and laughed, with a final whoop. A gray donkey investigated his hip pocket, and he reached back and prodded the intruder with his stick.

"You seem to be up on the woman question, Mosey. It 's queer you ain't married."

The old man was lifting a boulder to hold down a broken bale of hay, and made no reply. His visitor started toward the cabin. The old man adjusted another boulder and trotted after his guest, brushing the hay from his flannel shirt. A column of blue-white smoke arose from the rusty stovepipe in the cabin roof, and the smell of overdone coffee drifted out upon the spiced air.

"I was just about settin' down," said the host, placing another plate and cup and saucer on the blackened redwood table. "I 'll fry you some more bacon and eggs."

The visitor watched him as he hurried about with the short, uncertain steps of hospitable old age.

"By gum, Mosey, I 'd marry a grass-widow with a second-hand family before I 'd do my own cooking."

The young fellow gave a self-conscious laugh that made the old man glance at him from under his weather-beaten straw hat.

"Your mind seems to run on marryin'," he said; "guess you 're hungry. Set up and have some breakfast."

The visitor drew up a wooden chair, and the old man poured two cups of black coffee from the smoke-begrimed coffee-pot and returned it to the stove. Then he took off his hat and seated himself opposite his guest. The latter stirred three heaping teaspoonfuls of sugar into his cup, muddied the resulting syrup with condensed milk, and drank it with the relish of abnormal health.

"I tell you what, Mosey," he said, reaching for a slice of bacon and dripping the grease across the table, "there ain't any flies on the women when it comes to housekeeping. Now, a woman would turn on the soapsuds and float you clean out of this house; then she 'd mop up, and put scalloped noospapers on all the shelves, and little white aprons on the windows, and pillow-shams on your bunk, and she 'd work a doily for you to lay your six-shooter on, with 'God bless our home' in the corner of it; and she 'd make you so comfortable you would n't know what to do with yourself."

"I 'm comfortable enough by myself," said the old man uneasily. "When you work for yourself, you know who 's boss."

"Naw, you don't, Mosey, not by a long shot; you don't know whether you 're boss or the cookin'. I tried bachin' once" — the speaker made a grimace of reminiscent disgust; "the taste has n't gone out of my mouth yet. You 're a pretty fair cook, Mosey, but you 'd ought to see my girl's biscuits; she makes 'em so light she has to put a napkin

over 'em to keep 'em from floating around like feathers. Fact!" He reached over and speared a slice of bread with his fork. "If I keep this job on the trail, maybe you 'll have a chance to sample them biscuits. I 'm goin' to send East for that girl."

"Where you goin' to live?"

"Well, I did n't know but we could rent this ranch and board you, Mosey. Seems to me you ought to retire. It ain't human to live this way. If you was to die here all by yourself, you 'd regret it. Well, I must toddle."

The visitor stood a moment on the step, sweeping the valley with his fresh young glance; then he set his hat on the back of his head and went whistling down the road, waving his stick at old Mosey as he disappeared among the sycamores in the wash. The old man gathered the dishes into a rusty pan, and scalded them with boiling water from the kettle.

"I believe I 'll do it," he said, as he fished the hot saucers out by their edges and turned them down on the table; "it can't do no harm to write to her, no way."

II

Mrs. Moxom put on her slat sunbonnet, took a tin pan from the pantry shelf, and hurried across the kitchen toward the door. Her daughter-in-law looked up from the corner where she was kneading bread. She was a short, plump woman, and all of her convexities seemed emphasized by flour. She put up the back of her hand to adjust a loosened lock of hair, and added another high light to her forehead.

"Where you going, mother?" she called anxiously.

The old woman did not turn her head.

"Oh, just out to see how the lettuce is coming on. I had a notion I 'd like some for dinner, wilted with ham gravy."

"Can't one of the children get it?"

There was no response. Mrs. Weaver turned back to her bread.

"Your grandmother seems kind of fidgety this morning," she fretted to her eldest daughter, who was decorating the cupboard shelves with tissue paper of an enervating

magenta hue, and indulging at intervals in vocal reminiscences of a ship that never returned.

"Oh, well, mother," said that young person comfortably, "let her alone. I think we all tag her too much. I hate to be tagged myself."

"Well, I 'm sure I don't want to tag her, Ethel ; I just don't want her to overdo."

Mrs. Weaver spoke in a tone of mingled injury and self-justification.

"Oh, well, mother, she is n't likely to put her shoulder out of joint pulling a few heads of lettuce."

The girl broke out again into cheerful interrogations concerning the disaster at sea: —

"Did she never*r* re*tur*ren?
No, she never*r* re*tur*rened."

Mrs. Weaver gave a little sigh, as if she feared her daughter's words might prove prophetic, and buried her plump fists in the puffy dough.

Old Mrs. Moxom turned when she reached the garden gate and glanced back at the

house. Then she clasped the pan to her breast and skurried along the fence toward the orchard. Once under the trees, she did not look behind her, but went rapidly toward the field where she knew her son was plowing. The reflection of the sun on the tin pan made him look up, and when he saw her he stopped his team. She came across the soft brown furrows to his side.

"I 'd have come to the fence when I saw you, if I had n't had the colt," he said kindly. "What 's wanted?"

The old woman's face twitched. She pushed her sunbonnet back with one trembling hand.

"Jason," she said, with a little jerk in her voice, "your paw 's alive."

The man arranged the lines carefully along the colt's back; then he took off his hat and wiped the top of his head on his sleeve, looking away from his mother with heavy, dull embarrassment.

"I expect you 'd 'most forgot all about him," pursued the old woman, with a vague reproach in her tone.

"I had n't much to forget," answered the man, resentment rising in his voice. "He has n't troubled himself about me."

"Well, he did n't know anything about you, Jason, he went away so soon after we was married. It 's a dreadful position to be placed in. It 'u'd be awfully embarrassing to — to the Moxom girls."

The man gave her a quick, curious glance. He had never heard her speak of his half-sisters in that way before.

"They 're so kind of high-toned," she went on, "just as like as not they 'd blame me. I 'm sure I don't know what to do."

Jason kicked the soft earth with his sunburnt boot.

"Where is he ?" he asked sullenly.

"In Californay."

"How 'd you hear ?"

"I got a letter. He wrote to Burtonville and directed it to Mrs. Angeline Weaver, and the postmaster give it to some of your uncle Samuel's folks, and they put it in another envelope and backed it to me here. I thought at first I would n't say anything about it,

but it seemed as if I 'd ought to tell you; it does n't hurt you any, but it 's awful hard on the — the Moxom girls."

The man shifted his weight, and kicked awhile with his other foot.

"Well, I 'd just give him the go-by," he announced resolutely. "You 're a decent man's widow, and that 's enough. He 's never" —

"Oh, I ain't saying anything against your step-paw, Jason," the old woman broke in anxiously. "He was an awful good man. It seems queer to think it was the way it was. Dear me, it 's all so kind of confusing!"

The poor woman looked down with much the same embarrassment over her matrimonial redundance that a man might feel when suddenly confronted by twins.

"I 'm sure I don't see how I could help thinking he was dead," she went on after a little silence, "when he wrote he was going off on that trip and might never come back, and the man that was with him wrote that they got lost from each other, and water was so scarce and all that. And then, you know,

I did n't get married again till you was 'most ten years old, Jason. I 'm sure I don't know what to do. I don't want to mortify anybody, but I 'd like to know just what 's my dooty."

"Well, I can tell you easy enough." The man's voice was getting beyond control, but he drew it in with a quick, angry breath. "Just drop the whole thing. If he 's got on for forty years, mother, I guess he can manage for the rest of the time."

"But it ain't so easy managin' when you begin to get old, Jason. I know how that is."

Her son jerked the lines impatiently, and the colt gave a nervous start.

"I suppose you know this farm really came to you from your paw, don't you, Jason?" she asked humbly.

"Don't know as I did," answered the man, without enthusiasm.

"Well, you see, after we was married, your grandfather Weaver offered your paw this quarter-section if he 'd stay here in Ioway; but he had his heart set on going to Californay, and did n't want it; so after it turned

out the way it did, and you was born, your grandfather gave me this farm, and I done very well with it. That 's the reason your step-paw insisted on you having it when we was dividing things up before he died."

" Seems to me father worked pretty hard on this place himself."

The man said the word "father" half defiantly.

" Mr. Moxom? Oh, yes, he was a first-rate manager, and the kindest man that ever drew breath. I remember when your sister Angie was born — oh, dear me! " — the old woman felt her voice giving way, and stopped an instant, — " it seems so kind of strange. Well, I guess we 'd better just drop it, Jason. I must go back to the house. Emma did n't like my coming for lettuce. She 'll think I 've planted some, and am waitin' for it to come up."

She gave her son a quivering smile as she turned away. He stood still and watched her until she had crossed the plowed ground. It seemed to him she walked more feebly than when she came out.

"That's awful queer," he said, shaking his head, "calling her own daughters 'the Moxom girls.'"

III

Ethel Weaver had been to Ashland for the mail, and was driving home in the summer dusk. A dash of rain had fallen while she was in the village, and the air was full of the odor of moist earth and the sweetness of growing corn. The colt she was driving held his head high, glancing from side to side with youthful eagerness for a sensation, and shying at nothing now and then in sheer excess of emotion over the demand of his monotonous life.

The girl held a letter in her lap, turning the pages with one unincumbered hand, and lifting her flushed face with a contemptuous "Oh, Barney, you goose!" as the colt drew himself into attitudes of quivering fright, which dissolved suddenly at the sound of her voice and the knowledge that another young creature viewed his coquettish terrors with the disrespect born of comprehension.

As they turned into the lane west of the house, Ethel folded her letter and thrust it hastily into her pocket, and the colt darted through the open gate and drew up at the side door with a transparent assumption of serious purpose suggested by the proximity of oats.

"Ed!" called the girl, "the next time you hitch up Barney for me, I wish you 'd put a kicking-strap on him. I had a picnic with him coming down the hill by Arbuckle's."

Ed maintained the gruff silence of the half-grown rural male as he climbed into the buggy beside his sister and cramped the wheel for her to dismount.

"They have n't any quart jars over at the store, mother," said Ethel, entering the house and walking across to the mirror to remove her hat. "They 're expecting some every day. Well, I do look like the Witch of Endor!" she exclaimed, twisting her loosened rope of hair and skewering it in place with a white celluloid pin. "That colt acted as if he was possessed."

"Oh, I 'm sorry about the jars," said Mrs.

Weaver regretfully. "I wanted to finish putting up the curr'n's to-morrow."

"Did you get any mail?" quavered grandmother Moxom.

"I got a letter from Rob."

There was a little hush in the room. The girl stood still before the mirror, with a sense of support in the dim reflection of her own face.

"Is he well?" ventured the old woman feebly, glancing toward her daughter-in-law.

"Yes, he's well; he's got steady work on some road up the mountain. He writes as if people keep going up, but he never tells what they go up for. He said something about a lot of burros, and at first I thought he was in a furniture store, but I found out he meant mules. An old man keeps them, and hires them out to people. Rob calls him 'old Mosey.' They 're keeping bach together. Rob tried to make biscuits, and he says they tasted like castor oil."

As her granddaughter talked, Mrs. Moxom seemed to shrink deeper and deeper into the patchwork cushion of her chair.

"Rob wants me to come out there and be married," pursued the girl, bending nearer to the mirror and returning her own gaze with sympathy.

"Why, Ethel!" Mrs. Weaver's voice was full of astonished disapproval. "I should think you 'd be ashamed to say such a thing."

"I did n't say it; Rob said it," returned the girl, making a little grimace at herself in the glass.

"Well, I have my opinion of a young man that will say such a thing to a girl. If a girl 's worth having, she 's worth coming after."

Mrs. Weaver made this latter announcement with an air of triumph in its triteness. Her daughter gave a little sniff of contempt.

"Well, if a fellow 's worth having, is n't he worth going to?" she asked with would-be flippancy.

"Why, Ethel Imogen Weaver!" Mrs. Weaver repeated her daughter's name slowly, as if she hoped its length might arouse in the owner some sense of her worth. "I never did hear the like."

The girl left the mirror, and seated herself in a chair in front of her mother.

"It 'll cost Rob a hundred dollars to come here and go back to California, and a hundred dollars goes a long way toward fixing up. Besides, he 'll lose his job. I 'd just as soon go out there as have him come here. If people don't like it they — they need n't."

The girl's fresh young voice began to thicken, and she glanced about in restless search of diversion from impending tears.

"Well, girls do act awful strange these days."

Mrs. Weaver took warning from her daughter's tone and divided her disapproval by multiplying its denominator.

"Yes, they do. They act sometimes as if they had a little sense," retorted Ethel huskily.

"Well, I don't know as I call it sense to pick up and run after a man, even if you 're engaged to him; do you, mother?"

Old Mrs. Moxom started nervously at her daughter-in-law's appeal.

"Well, it does seem a long way to go

on — on an uncertainty, Ethel," she faltered.

The girl turned a flushed, indignant face upon her grandmother.

"Well, I hope you don't mean to call Rob an uncertainty?" she demanded angrily.

"Oh, no; I don't mean that," pleaded the old woman. "I have n't got anything agen' Rob. I don't suppose he 's any more uncertain than — than the rest of them. I" —

"Why, grandmother Moxom," interrupted the girl, "how you talk! I 'm sure father is n't an uncertainty, and there was n't anything uncertain about grandfather Moxom. To tell the honest truth, I think they 're just about as certain as we are."

The old woman got up and began to move the chairs about with purposeless industry.

"It 's awful hard to know what to do sometimes," she said, indulging in a generality that might be mollifying, but was scarcely glittering.

"Well, it is n't hard for me to know *this* time," said Mrs. Weaver, her features drawn into a look of pudgy determination. "No

girl of mine shall ever go traipsing off to California alone on any such wild-goose chase."

Ethel got up and moved toward the stairway, her tawny head thrown back, and an eloquent accentuation of heel in her tread.

"I just believe old folks like for young folks to be foolish and wasteful," she said over her shoulder, "so they can have something to nag them about. I'm sure I"— She slammed the door upon her voice, which seemed to be carried upward in a little whirlwind of indignation.

Mrs. Weaver glanced at her mother-in-law for sympathy, but the old woman refused to meet her gaze.

"I'm just real mad at Rob Kendall for suggesting such a thing and getting Ethel all worked up," clucked the younger woman anxiously.

Mrs. Moxom came back to her chair as aimlessly as she had left it.

"Men-folks are kind of helpless when it comes to planning," she said apologetically. "To think of them poor things trying to

keep house — and the biscuits being soggy! It does kind of work on her feelings, Emma."

Mrs. Weaver gave her mother-in-law a glance of rotund severity.

"I don't mind their getting married," she said, "but I want it done decent. I don't intend to pack my daughter off to any man as if she was n't worth coming after, biscuits or no biscuits!"

She lifted her chin and looked at her companion over the barricade of conventionality that lay between them with the air of one whose position is unassailable. The old woman sighed with much the same air, but with none of her daughter-in-law's satisfaction in it.

"I'm sure I don't know," she said drearily; "sometimes it ain't easy to know your dooty at a glance."

Mrs. Weaver made no response, but her expression was not favorable to such lax uncertainty.

"The way mother Moxom talked," she said to her husband that night, "you 'd have thought she sided with Ethel."

Jason Weaver was far too much of a man to hazard an opinion on the proprieties in the face of his wife's disapproval, so he grunted an amiable acquiescence in that spirit of justifiable hypocrisy known among his kind as "humoring the women-folks." Privately he was disposed to exult in his daughter's spirit and good sense, and so long as these admirable qualities did not take her away from him, and paternal pride and affection were both gratified, he saw no reason to complain. This satisfaction, however, did not prevent his "stirring her up" now and then, as he said, that he might sun himself in the glow of her youthful temper and chuckle inwardly over her smartness.

"Well, Dot, how 's Rob?" he asked jovially one evening at supper about a month later. "Does he still think he 's worth running after?"

"I don't know whether he thinks so or not, but I know he is," asserted the young woman, tilting her chin and looking away from her father with a cool filial contempt for his pleasantries bred by familiarity.

"He 's well enough, but the old man that lives with him had a fall and broke his leg, and Rob has to take care of him."

Old Mrs. Moxom laid down her knife and fork, and dropped her hands in her lap hopelessly.

"Well, now, what made him go and do that?" she asked, with a fretful quaver in her voice, as if this were the last straw.

"I don't know, grandmother," answered Ethel cheerfully. "As soon as he 's well enough to be moved, they 're going to take him to the county hospital. I guess that 's the poorhouse. But Rob says he 's so old they 're afraid the bone won't knit; he suffers like everything. Poor old man, I 'm awful sorry for him. Rob has to do all the cooking."

The old woman pushed back her chair and brushed the crumbs from her apron.

"I guess I 'll go upstairs and lay down awhile, Emma. I been kind of light-headed all afternoon. I guess I set too long over them carpet rags."

She got up and crossed the room hurriedly. Her son looked after her with anx-

ious eyes. Presently they heard her toiling up the stairs with the slow, inelastic tread of infancy and old age.

"I don't know what 's come over your mother, Jason," said his wife. "She has n't been herself all summer. Sometimes I think I 'd ought to write to the girls."

"Oh, I guess she 'll be all right," said Jason, with masculine hopefulness. "Dot, you 'd better go up by and by and see if grandmother wants anything."

Safe in her own room, Mrs. Moxom sank into a chair with a long breath of relief and dismay.

"The poorhouse!" she gasped. "That seems about as mortifying as to own up to your girls that you was n't never rightly married to their father."

She got up and wandered across the room to the bureau. "I expect he 's changed a good deal," she murmured. She took a daguerreotype from the upper drawer, and gazed at it curiously. "Yes, I expect he 's changed quite a good deal," she repeated, with a sigh.

IV

"Why, mother Moxom!"

Mrs. Weaver sank into her sewing-chair in an attitude of pulpy despair.

"Well, I don't see but what it 's the best thing for me to do," asserted the old woman. "The cold weather 'll be coming on soon, and I always have more or less rheumatism, and they say Californay 's good for rheumatism. Besides, I think I need to stir round a little; I 've stayed right here 'most too close; and as long as Ethel has her heart set on going, I don't see but what it 's the best plan. If I go along with her, I can make sure that everything 's all right. If you and Jason say she can't go, why, then, I don't see but what I 'll just have to start off and make the trip alone."

"Why, mother Moxom, I just don't know what to say!"

Mrs. Weaver's tone conveyed a deep-seated sense of injury that she should thus be deprived of speech for such insufficient cause.

"'T is n't such a very hard trip," pursued the old woman doggedly. "They say you get on one of them through trains and take your provision and your knitting, and just live along the road. It is n't as if you had to change cars at every junction, and get so turned round you don't know which way your head 's set on your shoulders."

Mrs. Weaver's expression began to dissolve into reluctant interest in these details.

"Well, of course, if you think it 'll help your rheumatism, and you 've got your mind made up to go, *some*body 'll have to go with you. Have you asked Jason ?"

"No, I have n't." Mrs. Moxom's voice took on an edge. "I can't see just why I 've got to ask people; sometimes I think I 'm about old enough to do as I please."

"Why, of course, mother," soothed the daughter-in-law. "Would you go and see the girls before you 'd start?"

"No, I don't believe I would," answered the old woman, her voice relaxing under this acquiescence. "They 'd only make a fuss.

They 've both got good homes and good men, and they 're married to them right and lawful, and there 's nothing to worry about. Besides, I 'd just get interested in the children, and that 'd make it harder. I 've done the best I knew how by the girls, and I don't know as they 've got any reason to complain " —

" Why, no, mother," interrupted the daughter-in-law, with rising feathers, " I never heard anybody say but what you 'd done well by all your children. I only thought they 'd want to see you. I think they 'd come over if they knew it — well, of course, Angie could n't, having a young baby so, but Laura she 'd come in a minute."

" Well, I don't believe I want to see them," persisted Mrs. Moxom. " It 'll only make it harder. I guess you need n't let them know I 'm goin'. Ethel and I 'll start as soon as she can get ready. Seems like Rob 's having a pretty hard time. He could n't come after Ethel now if he wanted to. It would n't be right for him to leave that — that — old gentleman."

"Well, I would n't want the girls to have any hard feelings towards me."

"The Moxom girls ain't a-going to have any hard feelings towards *you*, Emma," asserted the old woman, with emphasis.

"She has the queerest way of talking about your sisters, Jason," Mrs. Weaver confided to her husband later. "It makes me think, sometimes, she 's failing pretty fast."

V

As the road to the foot of the trail grew steeper, Rob Kendall found an increasing difficulty in guiding his team with one hand. His bride drew herself from his encircling arm reluctantly.

"You 'd better look after the horses," she said, with a vivid blush. "What 'll grandmother think of us ?"

The young fellow removed the offending arm and reached back to pat the old lady's knee.

"I ain't afraid of grandmother," he said joyously. "Grandmother 's a brick. If she

stays out here long, she 'll soon be the youngest woman on the mesa. I should n't wonder if she 'd pick up some nice old gentleman herself — how 's that, grandmother?" He bent down and kissed his wife's ear. "Catch me going back on grandmothers after this!"

"You have n't changed a bit, Rob," said Ethel fondly; "has he, grandmother?" She turned her radiant smile upon the withered face behind her.

The old woman did not answer. The newly wedded couple resumed their rapturous contemplation of each other.

"How 's that funny old man, Rob?" asked Ethel, smoothing out her dimples.

"Old Mosey? He 's pretty rocky. I 'm afraid he won't pull through." Rob strove to adjust his voice to the subject. "I 'd 'a' got a house down in town, but I did n't like to leave him. We 'll have to go pretty soon, though. I 'm afraid you 'll be lonesome up here."

The old woman on the back seat leaned forward a little. The young couple smiled

exultantly into each other's eyes, with superb scorn of the world.

"Lonesome!" sneered the girl.

Her husband drew her close to him with an ecstatic hug.

"Yes, lonesome," he laughed, his voice smothered in her bright hair.

The old woman settled back in her seat. The team made their way slowly through the sandy wash between the boulders. When they emerged from the sycamores, Rob pointed toward the cabin. "That's the place!" he said triumphantly.

The sunset was sifting through the live-oaks upon the shake roof. Two tents gleamed white beside it, frescoed with the shadow of moving leaves. Ethel lifted her head from her husband's shoulder, and looked at her home with the faith in her eyes that has kept the world young.

"I've put up some tents for us," said the young fellow gleefully; "but you must n't go in till I get the team put away. I won't have you laughing at my housekeeping behind my back. Old Mosey's asleep in the

shanty; the doctor gives him something to keep him easy. You can go in there and sit down, grandmother; you won't disturb him."

He helped them out of the wagon, lingering a little with his wife in his arms. The old woman left them and went into the house. She crossed the floor hesitatingly, and bent over the feeble old face on the pillow.

"It's just as I expected; he's changed a good deal," she said to herself.

The old man opened his eyes.

"I was sayin' you'd changed a good deal, Moses," she repeated aloud.

There was no intelligence in his gaze.

"For that matter, I expect I've changed a good deal myself," she went on. "I heard you'd had a fall, and I thought I'd better come out. You was always kind of hard to take care of when you was sick. I remember that time you hurt your foot on the scythe, just after we was married; you would n't let anybody come near you but me" —

"Why, it's Angeline!" said the old man dreamily, with a vacant smile.

"Yes, it 's me."

He closed his eyes and drifted away again. The old wife sat still on the edge of the bed. Outside she could hear the sigh of the oaks and the trill of young voices. Two or three tears fell over the wrinkled face, written close with the past, like a yellow page from an old diary. She wiped them away, and looked about the room with its meagre belongings, which Rob had scoured into expectant neatness.

"He does n't seem to have done very well," she thought; "but how could he, all by himself?" She got up and walked to the door, and looked out at the strange landscape with its masses of purple mountains.

"I 've got to do one of two things," she said to herself. "I've just got to own up the whole thing, and let the girls be mortified, or else I 've got to keep still and marry him over again, and pass for an old fool the rest of my life. I don't believe I can do it. They 've got more time to live down disgrace than I have. I believe I 'll just come out and tell everything. Ethel!" she called.

"Come here, you and Rob; I've got something to tell you."

The young couple stood with locked arms, looking out over the valley. At the sound of her voice they clasped each other close in an embrace of passionate protest against the intrusion of this other soul. Then they turned toward the sunset, and went slowly and reluctantly into the house.

Lib

Lib

A YOUNG woman sat on the veranda of a small redwood cabin, putting her baby to sleep. The infant displayed that aggressive wide-awakeness which seems to characterize babies on the verge of somnolence. Now and then it plunged its dimpled fists into the young mother's bare white breast, stiffened its tiny form rebelliously, raised its head, and sent gleams of defiance from beneath its drooping eyelids.

It was late in March, and the ground about the cabin was yellow with low-growing compositæ. The air was honey-sweet and dripping with bird-song. Inside the house a woman and a girl were talking.

"Oh, he 's not worrying," said the latter. "What 's he got to worry about? He lets us do all that. Lib 's got the baby and we 've got to bear all the disgrace. I" —

"Myrtie," called a clear voice from the

veranda, "shut up! You may say what you please about me, and you may say what you please about him, but nobody's going to call this baby a disgrace."

She caught the child up and kissed the back of its neck with passionate vehemence. The baby struggled in her embrace and gave a little cry of outraged dignity.

Indoors the girl looked at her mother and bit her lip in astonished dismay.

"I did n't know she could hear," she whispered.

A tall young woman came up the walk, trailing her tawdry ruffles over the fragrant alfileria.

"Is Miss Sunderland" — She colored a dull pink and glanced at the baby.

"I'm Lib Sunderland. Won't you come in?" said Lib.

The newcomer sank down on the upper step and leaned against the post of the veranda.

"No. I don't want to see any one but you. I guess we can talk here."

The baby sat up at the sound of the stran-

ger's voice and stared at her with round, blinking eyes. She drew off her cotton gloves and whipped her knee with them in awkward embarrassment. She had small, regular features of the kind that remain the same from childhood to old age, and her liver-colored hair rolled in a billow almost to her eyes.

"Maybe you 'll think it strange for me to come," she began, "but I did n't know what else to do. I 'm Ruby Adair."

She waited a little, but her statement awoke no response in Lib's noncommittal face.

"I don't know whether you know what they 're saying over at the store or not," the visitor went on haltingly.

"No," said Lib, with dry indifference; "there ain't any men in our family to do the loafin' and gossipin' for us."

"Since you moved over here from Bunch Grass Valley, they 're saying that Thad Farnham is the — is — you know he was in the tile works over there a year or more ago."

"Yes, I know." Lib's voice was like the crackling of dead leaves under foot.

"I think it 's pretty hard," continued Miss Adair, gathering courage, and glancing from under the surf of her hair at her listener's impassive face; "him and me 's engaged!"

Lib's eyes narrowed, and the velvety down on her lip showed black against the whiteness around her mouth.

"What does *he* say?" she asked.

"What can he say?" Thad's fiancée broke out nervously, "except that it ain't so. But that does n't shut people's mouths. Nobody can do that but you. I think" — she raised her chin virtuously and twisted her gloves tight in her trembling hands — "that you ought to come out plain and tell who the man is — I mean the — you know what I mean!"

"Yes," said Lib dully, "I know what you mean."

There was a little silence, broken only by the mad twitter of nesting linnets in the passion-vine overhead.

"Of course," resumed the stranger, "I

would n't want you to think but what I 'm sorry for you. You 've been treated awful mean by somebody."

A surprised look grew in the eyes Lib fixed upon her visitor. The baby stirred in its sleep, and she bent down and rubbed her cheek against its hair.

"You need n't waste any time being sorry for me," she said.

"It 's too bad," continued Miss Adair, intent upon her own exalted charity, "but that does n't make it right for you to get other folks into trouble. You 'd ought to remember that."

"If you think he 's all right, why don't you go ahead and marry him?" asked Lib.

"My folks would make such a fuss, and besides I don't know as it would be just right for me to act like I did n't care, after all that 's been said — and me a church-member!"

Miss Ruby bent her head a little forward, as if under the weight of her moral obligations.

"Has he joined the church?" inquired Lib in a curious voice.

"He 's been going to the union meetings regular with me, and he 's stood up twice for prayers, but I dunno 's they 'd take him into the church with all these stories going about. You 'd ought to think of that, too — you may be standing in the way of saving his soul."

"If his soul was lost, it would be awful hard to find," said Lib quietly.

Her listener's weak mouth slackened. "Wh-at?" she asked, with a little stuttering gasp.

"Oh, I dunno. Some things *are* hard to find when they 're lost, you know."

"And you 'll speak up and tell the truth?" The visitor arose, gathering her flounces about her with one hand.

"If I speak up, I 'll tell the truth, you can bet on that," said Lib.

Miss Adair waited an instant, as if for some assurance which Lib did not vouchsafe. Then she writhed down the walk in her twisted drapery and disappeared.

Thad Farnham and his father had been cutting down a eucalyptus-tree. The two men looked small and mean clambering over the felled giant, as if belonging to some species of destructive insect. The tree in its fall had bruised the wild growth, and the air was full of oily medicinal odors. Long strips of curled cinnamon-colored bark strewed the ground. The father and son confronted each other across the pallid trunk. The older man's face was leathery-red with anger.

"The story 's got around that the kid 's yours, anyway," he announced. "I don't care who started it, but if it 's true, you 'll make a bee-line for the widow's and marry the girl. D' you hear?"

Thad dropped his eyes sullenly and made a feint of examining the crosscut saw.

"I don't go much on family," continued old Farnham, "and I never 'lowed you 'd set anything on fire excepting maybe yourself, but I 'm not raising sneaks and liars, and what little I 've got hain't been scraped together to fatten that kind of stock!"

"Who said I lied?"

"Nobody. But I 'm going to take you over to face that girl and see what she says. If you don't foller peaceable, I 'll coax you along with a hatful of cartridges. I hear you 've been whining around the revival meetings. I never suspected you till I heard that!"

"I don't see why you suspect a feller for lookin' after the salvation" —

"Oh, damn your salvation!" broke in the old man.

"Well, I dunno" —

"Well, I *do!*" roared the father; "I know you can't make an angel without a man to start with, and I 'll do what I can to furnish the man, seein' I 'm responsible for you bein' born in the shape of one, and the preachers may put in the wing and the tail feathers if they can! Now start that saw!"

Old Farnham and his son sat in the small front room of the widow Sunderland's cabin. The old man's jaw was set, and he grasped his knees with his big hairy hands as if to steady himself.

Neither of the men arose when Lib came

into the room with the baby. The old man's eyes followed her as she seated herself without so much as a glance at his companion.

"My name 's Farnham," he began hoarsely. "This is my son Thad. You 've met him, maybe ?" He stopped and cleared his throat.

Lib did not turn her head.

"Yes, I 've met him," she said quietly.

The old man's face turned the color of dull terra-cotta.

"They say he took advantage of you. I don't know. I was n't much as a young feller, but I was n't a scrub, and I don't savvy scrubs. I fetched him over here to-day to ask you if it 's true, and to say to you if it is, he 'll marry you or there 'll be trouble. That don't square it, but it 's the best I can do."

There was a tense stillness in the little room. The baby gave a squeal of delight and kicked a small red stocking from its dimpled foot. The old man picked it up and laid it on Lib's lap. She looked straight into his face for a while before she spoke.

"I guess you 're a good man, Mr. Farn-

ham," she said slowly. "I would n't mind being your daughter-in-law, if you had a son that took after you. I think the baby would like you very well for a grandpap, too. The older he grows, the more particular I 'm getting about his relations. I did n't think much about anything before he came, but I 've done a lot of thinkin' since. I guess that 's generally the way with girls."

She turned toward Thad, and her voice cut the air like a lash.

"Suppose you *was* the father of this baby, and had to be drug here by the scruff of the neck to own it, would n't you think I 'd done the poor little thing harm enough just by — by *that*, without tackin' you onto him for the rest of his life? No, sir!" She stood up and took a step backward. "You go and tell everybody — tell Ruby Adair, that I say this child has n't any father; he never had any, but he 's got a *mother*, and a mother that thinks too much of him to disgrace him by marrying a coward, which is more than she 'll be able to say for *her* children if she ever has any! Now go!"

For Value Received

For Value Received

A SOFT yellow haze lay over the San Jacinto plain, deepening into purple, where the mountains lifted themselves against the horizon. Nancy Watson stood in her cabin door, and held her bony, moistened finger out into the tepid air.

"I believe there 's a little breath of wind from the southeast, Robert," she said, with a desperate hopefulness; "but the air does n't feel rainy."

"Oh, I guess the rains 'll come along all right; they gener'lly do." The man's voice was husky and weak. "Anyway, the barley 'll hold its own quite a while yet."

"Oh, yes; quite a long while," acquiesced his wife, with an eager, artificial stress on the adjective. "I don't care much if the harvest is n't earlier 'n usual; I want you to pick up your strength."

She turned into the room, a strained smile

twitching her weather-stained face. She was glad Robert's bed was in the farthest corner away from the window. The barley-field that stretched about the little redwood cabin was a pale yellowish green, deeper in the depressions, and fading almost into brown on the hillocks. There had been heavy showers late in October, and the early sown grain had sprouted. It was past the middle of November now, and the sky was of that serene, cloudless Californian blue which is like a perpetual smiling denial of any possibility of rain.

"Is the barley turning yellow any?" queried the sick man feebly.

Nancy hesitated.

"Oh, not to speak of," she faltered, swallowing hard.

Her husband was used to that gulping sob in her voice when she stood in the door. There was a little grave on the edge of the barley-field. He had put a bit of woven-wire fence about it to keep out the rabbits, and Nancy had planted some geraniums inside the small inclosure. There were some of the

fiery blossoms in an old oyster can at the head of the little mound, lifting their brilliant smile toward the unfeeling blue of the sky.

"There 's pretty certain to be late rains, anyway," the man went on hoarsely. "Leech would let us have more seed if it was n't for the mortgage." His voice broke into a strained whisper on the last word.

Nancy crossed the room, and laid her knotted hand on his forehead.

"You hain't got any fever to-day," she said irrelevantly.

"Oh, no; I 'm gettin' on fine; I 'll be up in a day or two. The mortgage 'll be due next month, Nancy," he went on, looking down at his thin gray hands on the worn coverlet; "I calc'lated they 'd hold off till harvest, if the crop was comin' on all right." He glanced up at her anxiously.

The woman's careworn face worked in a cruel convulsive effort at self-control.

"It ain't right, Robert!" she broke out fiercely. "You 've paid more 'n the place is worth now; if they take it for what 's back, it ain't right!"

Her husband looked at her with pleading in his sunken eyes. He felt himself too weak for principles, hardly strong enough to cope with facts.

"But they ain't to blame," he urged; "they lent me the money to pay Thomson. It was straight cash; I guess it 's all right."

"There 's wrong somewhere," persisted the woman, hurling her abstract justice recklessly in the face of the evidence. "If the place is worth more, you 've made it so workin' when you was n't able. If they take it now, I 'll feel like burnin' down the house and choppin' out every tree you 've planted!"

The man turned wearily on his pillow. His wife could see the gaunt lines of his unshaven neck. She put her hand to her aching throat and looked at him helplessly; then she turned and went back to the door. The barley *was* turning yellow. She looked toward the little grave on the edge of the field. More than the place was worth, she had said. What was it worth? Suppose they should take it. She drew her high shoulders forward and shivered in the warm air. The

anger in her hard-featured face wrought itself into fixed lines. She recrossed the room, and sat down on the edge of the bed.

"How much is the mortgage, Robert?" she asked calmly. The sick man gave a sighing breath of relief, and drew a worn account-book from under his pillow.

"It 'll be $287.65, interest an' all, when it 's due," he said, consulting his cramped figures. Each knew the amount perfectly well, but the feint of asking and telling eased them both.

"I 'm going down to San Diego to see them about it," said Nancy; "I can't explain things in writing. There 's the money for the children's shoes; if the rains hold off, they can go barefoot till Christmas. Mother can keep Lizzie out of school, and I guess Bobbie and Frank can 'tend to things outside."

A four-year-old boy came around the house wailing out a grief that seem to abate suddenly at sight of his mother. Nancy picked him up and held him in her lap while she took a splinter from the tip of his little grimy

outstretched finger; then she hugged him almost fiercely, and set him on the doorstep.

"What 's the matter with gramma's baby?" called an anxious voice from the kitchen.

"Oh, nothing, mother; he got a sliver in his finger; I just took it out."

"He 's father's little soldier," said Robert huskily; "he ain't a-goin' to cry about a little thing like that."

The little soldier sat on the doorstep, striving to get his sobs under military discipline and contemplating his tiny finger ruefully.

An old woman came through the room with a white cloth in her hand.

"Gramma 'll tie it up for him," she said soothingly, sitting down on the step, and tearing off a bandage wide enough for a broken limb.

The patient heaved a deep sigh of content as the unwieldiness of the wounded member increased, and held his fat little fingers wide apart to accommodate the superfluity of rag.

"There, now," said the old woman, rub-

bing his soft little gingham back fondly; "gramma 'll go and show him the turkeys."

The two disappeared around the corner of the house, and the man and woman came drearily back to their conference.

"If you go, Nancy," said Robert, essaying a wan smile, "I hope you 'll be careful what you say to 'em; you must remember they don't *think* they 're to blame."

"I won't promise anything at all," asserted Nancy, hitching her angular shoulders; "more 'n likely, I 'll tell 'em just what I think. I ain't afraid of hurtin' their feelin's, for they hain't got any. I think money 's a good deal like your skin; it keeps you from feelin' things that make you smart dreadfully when you get it knocked off."

Robert smiled feebly, and rubbed his moist, yielding hand across his wife's misshapen knuckles.

"Well, then, you had n't ought to be hard on 'em, Nancy; it 's no more 'n natural to want to save your skin," he said, closing his eyes wearily.

"Robert Watson?"

The teller of the Merchants' and Fruit-growers' Bank looked through the bars of his gilded cage, and repeated the name reflectively. He did not notice the eager look of the woman who confronted him, but he did wonder a little that she had failed to brush the thick dust of travel from the shoulders of her rusty cape.

The teller was a slender, immaculate young man, whose hair arose in an alert brush from his forehead, which was high and seemed to have been polished by the same process that had given such a faultless and aggressive gloss to his linen. He turned on his spry little heel and stepped to the back of the inclosure, where he took a handful of long, narrow papers from a leather case, and ran over them hastily. Nancy did not think it possible that he could be reading them; the setting in his ring made a little streak of light as his fingers flew. She watched him with tense earnestness; it seemed to her that the beating of her heart shook the polished counter she leaned against. She hid her cot-

ton-gloved hands under her cape for fear he would see how they trembled.

The teller returned the papers to their case, and consulted a stout, short-visaged man, whose lips and brows drew themselves together in an effort of recollection.

The two men stood near enough to hear Nancy's voice. She pressed her weather-beaten face close to the gilded bars.

"I am Mrs. Watson. I came down to see you about it; my husband's been poorly and could n't come. We 'd like to get a little more time; we've had bad luck with the barley so far, but we think we can make it another season."

The men gave her a bland, impersonal attention.

"Yes ?" inquired the teller, with tentative sympathy, running his pencil through his upright hair, and tapping his forefinger with it nervously. "I believe that's one of Bartlett's personal matters," he said in an undertone.

The older man nodded, slowly at first, and then with increasing affirmation.

"You 're right," he said, untying the knot in his face, and turning away.

The teller came back to his place.

"Mr. Bartlett, the cashier, has charge of that matter, Mrs. Watson. He has not been down for two or three days: one of his children is very sick. I 'll make a note of it, however, and draw his attention to it when he comes in." He wrote a few lines hurriedly on a bit of paper, and impaled it on an already overcrowded spindle.

"Can you tell me where he lives?" asked Nancy.

The young man hesitated.

"I don't believe I would go to the house; they say it 's something contagious" —

"I 'm not afraid," interrupted Nancy grimly.

The teller wrote an address, and slipped it toward her with a nimble motion, keeping his hand outstretched for the next comer, and smiling at him over Nancy's dusty shoulder.

The woman turned away, suddenly aware that she had been blocking the wheels of

commerce, and made her way through the knot of men that had gathered behind her. Outside she could feel the sea in the air, and at the end of the street she caught a glimpse of a level blue plain with no purple mountains on its horizon.

Someway, the mortgage had grown smaller; no one seemed to care about it but herself. She had felt vaguely that they would be expecting her and have themselves steeled against her request. On the way from the station she had thought that people were looking at her curiously as the woman from "up toward Pinacate" who was about to lose her home on a mortgage. She had even felt that some of them knew of the little wire-fenced grave on the edge of the barley-field.

She showed the card to a boy at the corner, who pointed out the street and told her to watch for the number over the door.

"It is n't very far; 'bout four blocks up on the right-hand side. Yuh kin take the street car fer a nickel, er yuh kin walk fi' cents cheaper," he volunteered, whereupon

an older boy kicked him affectionately, and advised him in a nauseated tone to "come off."

Nancy walked along the smooth cement pavement, looking anxiously at the houses behind their sentinel palms. The vagaries of Western architecture conveyed no impression but that of splendor to her uncritical eye. The house whose number corresponded to the one on her card was less pretentious than some of the others, but the difference was lost upon her in the general sense of grandeur.

She went up the steps and rang the bell, with the same stifling clutch on her throat that she had felt in the bank. There was a little pause, and then the door opened, and Nancy saw a fragile, girl-like woman with a tear-stained face standing before her.

"Does Mr. Bartlett live here?" faltered the visitor, her chin trembling.

The young creature leaned forward like a flower wilting on its stem, and buried her face on Nancy's dusty shoulder.

"Oh, I 'm so glad to see you," she sobbed;

"I thought no one ever *would* come. I did n't know before that people were so afraid of scarlet fever. They have taken my baby away for fear he would take it. Do you know anything about it? Please come right in where she is, and tell me what you think."

Nancy had put her gaunt arm around the girl's waist, and was patting her quivering shoulder with one cotton-gloved hand. Two red spots had come on her high cheek-bones, and her lips were working. She let herself be led across the hall into an adjoining room, where a yellow-haired child lay restless and fever stricken. A young man with a haggard face came forward and greeted her eagerly. "Now, Flora," he said, smoothing his wife's disordered hair, "you don't need to worry any more; we shall get on now. I 'm sure she 's a little better to-day; don't you think so?" He appealed to Nancy, wistfully.

"Yes; I think she is," said Nancy stoutly, moving her head in awkward defiance of her own words.

"There, Flora, that 's just what the doctor said," pleaded the husband.

The young wife clung to the older woman desperately.

"Oh, do you think so?" she faltered. "You know, I never *could* stand it. She 's all — well, of course, there 's the baby — but — oh — you see — you know — I never could bear it!" She broke down again, sobbing, with her arms about Nancy's neck.

"Yes, you can bear it," said Nancy. "You can bear it if you have to, but you ain't a-goin' to have to — she 's a-goin' to get well. An' you 've got your man — you ought to recollect that" — she stifled a sob — "he seems well an' hearty."

The young wife raised her head and looked at her husband with tearful scorn. He met her gaze meekly, with that ready self-effacement which husbands seem to feel in the presence of maternity.

"Have you two poor things been here all alone?" asked Nancy.

"Yes," sobbed the girl-wife, this time on her husband's shoulder; "everybody was afraid, — we could n't get any one, — and I don't know anything. You 're the first wo-

man I 've seen since — oh, it 's been *so* long!"

"Well, you 're all nervous and worn out and half starved," announced Nancy, untying her bonnet-strings. "I 've had sickness, but I 've never been this bad off. Now, you just take care of the little girl, and I 'll take care of you."

It was a caretaking like the sudden stilling of the tempest that came to the little household. The father and mother would not have said that the rest and order that pervaded the house, and finally crept into the room where the sick child lay, came from a homely woman with an ill-fitting dress and hard, knotted hands. To them she seemed the impersonation of beauty and peace on earth.

That night Nancy wrote to her husband. The letter was not very explicit, but limited expression seems to have its compensations. There are comparatively few misunderstandings among the animals that do not write at all. To Robert the letter seemed entirely satisfactory. This is what she wrote : —

I have not had much time to see about the Morgage. One of their children is very sick and I will have to stay a few days. If the cough medisine gives out tell mother the directions is up by the Clock. I hope you are able to set up. Write and tell me how the Barley holds on. Tell the children to be good. Your loving wife,

NANCY WATSON.

"Nancy was always a great hand around where there 's sickness," Robert commented to his mother-in-law. "I hope she won't hurry home if she 's needed."

He wrote her to that effect the next day, very proud of his ability to sit up, and urging her not to shorten her stay on his account. "Ime beter and the Barly is holding its own," he said, and Nancy found it ample.

"This Mrs. Watson you have is a treasure," said the doctor to young Bartlett; "where did you find her?"

"Find her? I thought you sent her," answered Bartlett, in a daze.

"No; I could n't find any one; I was at my wits' end."

The two men stared at each other blankly.

"Well, it does n't matter where she came from," said the doctor, "so she stays. She 's a whole relief corps and benevolent society in one."

Young Bartlett spoke to Nancy about it the first time they were alone.

"Who sent you to us, Mrs. Watson?" he asked.

Nancy turned and looked out of the window.

"Nobody sent me — I just came."

Then she faced about.

"I don't want to deceive nobody. I come down from Pinacate to see you about some — some business. They told me at the bank that you was up at the house, so I come up. When I found how it was, I thought I 'd better stay — that 's all."

"From Pinacate — about some business?" queried the puzzled listener.

"Yes; I did n't mean to say anything to you; I don't want to bother you about it

when you 're in trouble an' all wore out. I told them down at the bank; they 'll tell you when you go down." And with this the young man was obliged to be content.

It was nearly two weeks before the child was out of danger. Then Nancy said she must go home. The young mother kissed her tenderly when they parted.

"I 'm so sorry you can't stay and see the baby," she said, with sweet young selfishness; "they 're going to bring him home very soon now. He 's *so* cute! Archie dear, go to the door with Mrs. Watson, and remember" — She raised her eyebrows significantly, and waited to see that her husband understood before she turned away.

The young man followed Nancy to the hall.

"How much do I owe" — He stopped, with a queer choking sensation in his throat.

Nancy's face flushed.

"I always want to be neighborly when there 's sickness," she said; "'most anybody does. I hope you 'll get on all right now. Good-by."

She held out her work-hardened hand, and the young man caught it in his warm, prosperous grasp. They looked into each other's eyes an instant, not the mortgagor and the mortgagee, but the woman and the man.

"Good-by, Mrs. Watson. I can never" — The words died huskily in his throat.

"Papa," called a weak, fretful little voice.

Nancy hitched her old cape about her high shoulders.

"Good-by," she repeated, and turned away.

Robert leaned across the kitchen table, and held a legal document near the lamp.

"It 's marked 'Satisfaction of mortgage' on the outside," he said in a puzzled voice; "and it must be our mortgage, for it tells all about it inside; but it says" — he unfolded the paper, and read from it in his slow, husky whisper, — "'The debt — secured thereby — having been fully paid — satisfied — and discharged.' I don't see what it means."

Nancy rested her elbows on the table, and looked across at him anxiously.

"It must be a mistake, Robert. I never said anything to them except that we 'd like to have more time."

He went over the paper again carefully.

"It reads very plain," he said. Then he fixed his sunken eyes on her thoughtfully. "Do you suppose, Nancy, it could be on account of what you done?"

"Me!" The woman stared at him in astonishment.

Suddenly Robert turned his eyes toward the ceiling, with a new light in his thin face.

"Listen!" he exclaimed breathlessly, "it 's raining!"

There was a swift patter of heralding drops, and then a steady, rhythmical drumming on the shake roof. The man smiled, with that ineffable delight in the music which no one really knows but the tiller of the soil.

Nancy opened the kitchen door and looked out into the night.

"Yes," she said, keeping something out of

her voice; "the wind 's strong from the southeast, and it 's raining steady."

Nancy Watson always felt a little lonesome when it rained. She had never mentioned it, but she could not help wishing there was a shelter over the little grave on the edge of the barley-field.

The Face of the Poor

The Face of the Poor

MR. ANTHONY attached a memorandum to the letter he was reading, and put his hand on the bell.

"Confound them!" he said under his breath, "what do they think I'm made of!"

A negro opened the door, and came into the room with exaggerated decorum.

"Rufus, take this to Mr. Whitwell, and tell him to get the answer off at once. Is any one waiting?"

"Yes, suh, several. One man 's been there some time. Says his name 's Busson, suh."

"Send him in."

The man gave his head a tilt forward which seemed to close his eyes, turned pivotally about, and walked out of the room in his most luxurious manner. Rufus never imitated his employer, but he often regretted that his employer did not imitate him.

Mr. Anthony's face resumed its look of

prosperous annoyance. The door opened, and a small, roughly dressed man came toward the desk.

"Well, here I am at last," he said in a tone of gentle apology; "I suppose you think it 's about time."

The annoyance faded out of Mr. Anthony's face, and left it blank. The visitor put out a work-callous hand.

"I guess you don't remember me; my name 's Burson. I was up once before, but you were busy. I hope you 're well; you look hearty."

Mr. Anthony shook the proffered hand, and then shrank back, with the distrust of geniality which is one of the cruel hardships of wealth.

"I am well, thank you. What can I do for you, Mr. Burson?"

The little man sat down and wiped the back of his neck with his handkerchief. He was bearded almost to the eyes, and his bushy brows stood out in a thatch. As he bent his gaze upon Mr. Anthony it was like some gentle creature peering out of a brushy covert.

"I guess the question 's what I can do for you, Mr. Anthony," he said, smiling wistfully on the millionaire; "I hain't done much this far, sure."

"Well?" Mr. Anthony's voice was dryly interrogative.

"When Edmonson told me he 'd sold the mortgage to you, I thought certain I 'd be able to keep up the interest, but I have n't made out to do even that; you 've been kept out of your money a long time, and to tell the truth I don't see much chance for you to get it. I thought I 'd come in and talk with you about it, and see what we could agree on."

Mr. Anthony leaned back rather wearily.

"I might foreclose," he said.

The visitor looked troubled. "Yes, you could foreclose, but that would n't fix it up. To tell the truth, Mr. Anthony, I don't feel right about it. I have n't kep' up the place as I 'd ought; it 's been running down for more 'n a year. I don't believe it 's worth the mortgage to-day."

Some of the weariness disappeared from

Mr. Anthony's face. He laid his arms on the desk and leaned forward.

"You don't think it's worth the mortgage?" he asked.

"Not the mortgage and interest. You see there's over three hundred dollars interest due. I don't believe you could get more 'n a thousand dollars cash for the place."

"There would be a deficiency judgment, then," said the millionaire.

"Well, that's what I wanted to ask you about. I supposed the law was arranged some way so you'd get your money. It's no more 'n right. But it seems a kind of a pity for you and me to go to law. There ain't nothing between us. I had the money, and you the same as loaned it to me. It was money you'd saved up again old age, and you'd ought to have it. If I'd worked the place and kep' it up right, it would be worth more, though of course property's gone down a good deal. But mother and the girls got kind of discouraged and wanted me to go to peddlin' fruit, and of course you can't do more 'n one thing at a time, and do it justice. Now if you

had the place, I expect you could afford to keep it up, and I would n't wonder if you could sell it; but you 'd have to put some ready money into it first, I 'm afraid."

Mr. Anthony pushed a pencil up and down between his thumb and forefinger, and watched the process with an inscrutable face. His visitor went on:—

"I was thinking if we could agree on a price, I might deed it to you and give you a note for the balance of what I owe you. I 'm getting on kind of slow, but I don't believe but what I could pay the note after a while."

Mr. Anthony kept his eyes on his lead pencil with a strange, whimsical smile.

"Edmonson owed me two thousand dollars," he said, "the mortgage really cost me that; at least it was all I got on the debt."

The visitor made a regretful sound with his tongue against the roof of his mouth.

"You don't say so! Well, that is too bad."

The thatch above the speaker's eyes stood out straight as he reflected.

"You 're worse off than I thought," he

went on slowly, "but it don't quite seem as if I ought to be held responsible for that. I had the thousand dollars, and used it, and I 'd ought to pay it; but the other — it was a kind of a trade you made — I can't see — you don't think" —

Mr. Anthony broke into his hesitation with a short laugh.

"No, I don't think you 're responsible for my blunders," he said soberly. "You say property has gone down a good deal," he went on, fixing his shrewd eyes on his listener. "A good many other things have gone down. If my money will buy more than it would when it was loaned, some people would say I should n't have so much of it. Perhaps I 'm not entitled to more than the place will bring. What do you think about that?" There was a quizzical note in the rich man's voice.

Burson wiped the back of his neck with his handkerchief, dropped it into his hat, and shook the hat slowly and reflectively, keeping time with his head.

"If you 'd kep' your money by you, allowin' that you loaned it to me, — because you

the same as did, — if you 'd kep' it by you or put it in the bank and let it lay idle, you 'd 'a' had it. It would n't 'a' gone down any. You had n't ought to lose anything, that I can see, — except of course for your mistake about Edmonson. That kind of hurts me about Edmonson. I would n't 'a' thought it of him. He always seemed a clever sort of fellow."

"Oh, Edmonson 's all right," said Mr. Anthony; "he went into some things too heavily, and broke up. I guess he 'll make it yet."

Burson looked relieved. "Then he 'll straighten this up with you, after all," he said.

Mr. Anthony whistled noiselessly. "Well, hardly. He considers it straightened."

Burson turned his old hat slowly around between his knees.

"He 's a fair-spoken man, Edmonson; I kind of think he 'll square it up, after all," he said hopefully. "Anyway, it does n't become me to throw stones till I 've paid my own debts."

The hair that covered the speaker's mouth

twitched a little in its effort to smile. He glanced at his companion expectantly.

"Could you come out and take a look at the place?" he asked.

Mr. Anthony slid down in his chair, and clasped his hands across his portliness.

"I believe I 'll take your valuation, Burson," he answered slowly; "if I find there 's nothing against the property but my mortgage, and you 'll give me a deed and your note for the interest, or, say, two hundred and fifty dollars, we 'll call it square. It will take a few days to look the matter up, a week, perhaps. Suppose you come in at the end of the week. Your wife will sign the deed?" he added interrogatively.

Burson had leaned forward to get up. At the question he raised his eyes with the look that Mr. Anthony remembered to have seen years ago in small creatures he had driven into corners.

"Mother did n't have to sign the mortgage," he said, halting a little before each word, "the lawyer said it was n't necessary. I don't know if she 'll" —

Mr. Anthony broke into his embarrassment. "Let me see." He put his hand on the bell.

"Ask Mr. Evert to send me the mortgage from Burson to Edmonson, assigned to me," he said when Rufus appeared.

The negro walked out of the room as if he were carrying the message on his head.

"Mother does n't always see things just as I do," said Burson; "she was willing to sign the mortgage, though," he added, "only she did n't need to; she wanted me to get the money of Edmonson."

He put his hand into his pocket, and a light of discovery came into his face.

"Have a peach," he said convivially, laying an enormous Late Crawford on the corner of the desk. Mr. Anthony gave an uncomprehending glance at the gift. "Hain't you got a knife?" asked Burson, straightening himself and drawing a bone-handled implement from his pocket; "I keep the big blade for fruit," he said kindly, as he laid it on the desk.

Mr. Anthony inspected the proffered re-

freshment with a queer, uncertain smile; then he took the peach from the desk, drew the wastebasket between his knees, opened the big blade of the knife, and began to remove the red velvet skin. The juice ran down his wrists and threatened his immaculate cuffs. He fished a spotless handkerchief from his pocket with his pencil and mopped up the encroaching rivulets. His companion smiled upon him with amiable relish as the dripping sections disappeared.

"I errigated 'em more than usual this year, and it makes 'em kind of sloppy to eat," he apologized; "it does n't help the flavor any, but most people buy for size. When you 're out peddling and have n't time to cultivate, it 's easy to turn on the water. It 's about as bad as a milkman putting water in the milk, and I always feel mean about it. I tell mother errigating 's a lazy man's way of farming, but she says water costs so much here she does n't think it 's cheating to sell it for peach-juice."

Rufus came into the room, and bore down upon the pair with deferential disdain. Mr.

Anthony gave his fingers a parting wipe, and took the papers from the envelope.

"It 's all right, Burson," he said after a little, "you need n't mind about your wife's signature. I 'll risk it. Come back in about a week, say Thursday, Thursday at ten, if that suits you. I 'll have my attorney look into it."

Burson got up and started out. Then he turned and stood still an instant.

"Of course, I mean to tell mother about the deed," he said; "I would n't want you to think" —

"Oh, certainly, certainly," acquiesced Mr. Anthony with an almost violent waiving of domestic confidence. "Good-afternoon, Mr. Burson." He whirled his revolving chair toward the desk with a distinct air of dismissal, and picked up the package of papers.

After the door closed he sat still for some time, looking thoughtfully at the mortgage; then he made a memorandum in ink, with his signature in full, and attached it to the document. Rufus opened the door.

"Mr. Darnell and two other gentlemen, suh."

The millionaire set his jaws. "Show them in, Rufus. Damn it," he said softly, — "damn it, why can't they be honest!"

"Do you mean to tell me, Erastus Burson, that you deeded him this place, and gave him your note for two hundred and fifty dollars you did n't owe him?"

"Why, no, mother; did n't I explain to you there 'd be a deficiency judgment?"

"Well, I should say there was. But if anybody 's lackin' judgment I 'd say it was you, not him. The idea! Why he 's as rich as cream, and you 're as poor" —

"Well, his being rich and me being poor has n't got anything to do with it, mother; we 're just two men trying to be fair with each other, don't you see? You and the girls would n't want me to be close-fisted and overreachin', even if I am poor. I think we fixed it up just as near right as a wrong thing can be fixed. Of course I don't like to feel the way I do about Edmonson, but Mr. Anthony don't seem to lay up anything again him, and he 's the one that has the right to.

Edmonson treated him worse than anybody ever treated me. I don't know just how I'd feel toward a man if he 'd treated me the way Edmonson treated Mr. Anthony."

Mrs. Burson laid the overalls she was mending across her knee in a suggestive attitude.

"I don't call it close-fisted or overreachin' to keep a roof over your family's head," she argued; "if the place is n't ours, I suppose we 'll have to leave it."

"No; Mr. Anthony wants us to stay here, and take care of the place for the rent. I feel as if I 'd ought to keep it up better, but if I 'm to peddle fruit and try to pay off the note, I 'll have to hustle. I want to do the square thing by him. He 's certainly treated me white."

Mrs. Burson fitted a patch on the seat of the overalls, and flattened it down with rather unnecessarily vigorous slaps of her large hand.

"I would n't lose any sleep over Mr. Anthony; I guess he' s able to take care of himself," she said, closing her lips suddenly as

if to prevent the escape of less amicable sentiments.

"Well, he does n't seem to be," urged her husband, "the way Edmonson 's overreached him. My! but I 'd hate to be in that fellow's shoes: doin' dirt to a man that a way!"

Mrs. Burson sighed audibly, and gave her husband a hopelessly uncomprehending look. "You do beat all, Erastus," she said wearily. "Here 's your overalls. I guess you can be trusted with 'em. They 're too much patched to give to Mr. Anthony."

Burson returned her look of uncomprehension. Fortunately the marital fog through which two pairs of eyes so often view each other is more likely to dull the outline of faults than of virtues. Mrs. Burson watched her husband not unfondly as he straddled into his overalls and left the room.

"A man does n't have to be very sharp to get the better of Erastus," she said to herself, "but he has to be awful low down; and I s'pose there 's plenty that is."

The winter came smilingly on, tantalizing

the farmer with sunny indifference concerning drouth, and when he was quite despondent sending great purple clouds from the southeast to wash away his fears. By Christmas the early oranges were yellowing. There had been no frost, and Burson's old spring-wagon and unshapely but well-fed sorrel team made their daily round of the valley, and now and then he dropped into Mr. Anthony's office to make small payments on his note. Pitifully small they seemed to the mortgagee, who appeared nevertheless always glad to receive them, and gave orders to Rufus, much to that dignitary's disgust, that the fruit-vender should always be admitted. The handful of coin which he so cheerfully piled on the corner of the rich man's desk always remained there until his departure, when Mr. Anthony took an envelope from the safe, swept the payment into it without counting, and returned it to its compartment, making no indorsement on the note.

"I 'd feel better satisfied if you 'd drive out some time and take a look at things," said Burson to his creditor during one of these

visits; "you 'd ought to get out of the office now and then for your health."

"Maybe I will, Burson," replied the capitalist. "You 're not away from home all the time?"

"Oh, no, but I s'pose Sunday 's your day off; it 's mine. Mother and the girls generally go to church, but I don't. I tell 'm I 'll watch, and they can pray. I can't very well go," he added, making haste to counteract the possible shock from his irreverence; "there ain't but one seat in the fruit-wagon, and when the women folks get their togs on, three 's about all that can ride. Come out any Sunday, and stay for dinner. We mostly have chicken."

The following Sunday Mr. Anthony drew up his daintily-stepping chestnut at the fruit-peddler's gate. Before he had descended from his shining road-wagon, his host ran down the walk, pulling on his shabby coat.

"Well, now, this is something like!" he exclaimed. "Got a hitching-strap? Just wait till I open the gate; I believe I 'd better

take your horse inside. There 's a post by the kitchen door. My, ain't he a beauty!"

Burson led the roadster through the gate, and Mr. Anthony walked by his side. When the horse was tied, the two men went about the place, and Erastus showed his guest the poultry and fruit trees, commenting on the merits of Plymouth Rocks and White Leghorns as layers, and displaying modest pride in the condition of the orchard.

"I 've kep' it up better this year. The rains come along more favorable and the weeds did n't get ahead of me the way they did last winter. Look out, there!" he cried, as Mr. Anthony laid his hand on the head of a Jersey calf that backed awkwardly from under his grasp. "Don't let her get a hold of your coat-tail; she chawed mine to a frazzle the other day; the girls pet her so much she has no manners."

When the tour of the little farm was finished the two men came back to the veranda, and Erastus drew a rocking-chair from the front room for his guest. It was hung with patchwork cushions of "crazy" design, but

Mr. Anthony leaned his tired head against them in the sanest content.

"Now you just sit still a minute," Erastus said, "and I'm a-going to bring you something you hain't tasted for a long time."

He darted into the house, and returned with a pitcher and two glasses.

"Sweet cider!" he announced, with a triumphant smile. "I had a lot of apples in the fall, not big enough to peddle, — you know our apples ain't anything to brag of, — and I just rigged up a kind of hand-press in the back yard, and now and then I press out a pitcher of cider for Sunday. I never let it get the least bit hard; not that I don't like a little tang to it myself, but mother belongs to the W. C. T. U., and it'd worry her."

He darted into the house again, and emerged with a plate of brown twisted cakes.

"Mother usually makes cookies on Saturday, but I can't find anything but these doughnuts. Maybe they won't go bad with the cider."

He poured his guest a glass, and Mr. Anthony drank it, holding a doughnut in

one hand, and partaking of it with evident relish.

"It's good, Burson," he said. "May I have another glass and another doughnut?"

His host's countenance fairly shone with delighted hospitality as he replenished the empty glass. There were crumbs on the floor when the visitor left, and flies buzzed about the empty plate and pitcher as Mrs. Burson and her daughters came up the steps.

"Mr. Anthony 's been here," said Erastus cheerfully; "I 'm awful sorry you missed him. We had some cider and doughnuts."

The three women stopped suddenly, and stared at the speaker.

"Why, Paw Burson!" ejaculated the elder daughter, "did you give Mr. Anthony doughnuts and cider out here on this porch?"

"Why, yes, Millie," apologized the father; "I looked for cookies, but I could n't find any. He said he liked doughnuts, and he did seem to relish 'em; he eat several."

"That awful rich man! Why, Paw Burson!"

The young woman gave an awe-stricken

glance about her, as if expecting to discover some lingering traces of wealth.

"Doughnuts!" she repeated helplessly.

"Why, Millie," faltered the father, mildly aggressive, "I don't see why being rich should take away a man's appetite; I 'm sure I hope I 'll never be too rich to like doughnuts and cider."

"Did n't you give him a napkin, paw?" queried the younger girl.

"No," said the father meekly, "he had his handkerchief. I coaxed him to stay to dinner, but he could n't; and I asked him to drive out some day with his wife and daughter — he has n't but one — they lost a little girl when she was seven" —

The man's voice quivered on the last word, and died away. Mrs. Burson went hurriedly into the house. She reappeared at the door in a few minutes without her bonnet.

"Erastus," she said gently, "will you split me a few sticks of kindling before you put away the team?"

Mrs. Burson was fitting a salad-green

bodice on her elder daughter. That young woman's efforts to see her own spine, where her mother was distributing pins with solemn intentness, had dyed her face a somewhat unnatural red, but the hands that lay upon her downy arms were much whiter than those that hovered about her back. A dining-table, bearing the more permanent part of its outfit, was pushed into a corner of the room, and covered with a yellow mosquito-net, and from the kitchen came a sound of crockery accompanied by an occasional splash and a scraping of tin. Now and then the younger girl appeared in the doorway and gazed in a sort of worshipful ecstasy at her sister's splendor.

"Do you think you 'll get it finished for the Fiesta, maw?" she asked, between deep breaths of admiration. Mrs. Burson nodded absently, exploring her bosom for another pin with her outspread palm.

Her husband came into the room, and seated himself on the edge of the rep lounge. His face had a strange pallor above the mask of his beard.

"You 're home early, Erastus," she said; then she looked up. "Are you sick?" she asked with anxiety.

"Mr. Anthony is dead," Burson said huskily.

"Dead! Why, Erastus!"

Mrs. Burson held a pin suspended in the air and stared at her husband.

"Yes. He dropped dead in his chair. Or rather, he had some kind of a stroke, and never came to. It happened more than a week ago. I went in to-day, and Rufus told me."

Mrs. Burson returned the pin to her bosom, and motioned her daughter toward the bedroom door.

"Go and take it off, Millie," she said soberly. She was shamefacedly conscious of something different from the grief that stirred her husband, something more sordid and personal.

"It hurt me all over," Burson went on, "the way some of them talked in town. They looked queer at me when I said what I did about him. I don't understand it."

"I guess there 's a good many things you don't understand, Erastus," ventured the wife quietly.

A carriage stopped at the gate, and a young woman alighted from it, and came up the walk. Erastus saw her first, and met her in the open doorway. She looked at him with eager intentness.

"Is this Mr. Burson?" she asked gently. "I am Mr. Anthony's daughter."

Mrs. Burson got up, holding the scraps of green silk in her apron, and offered the visitor a seat. Erastus held out his hand, and tried to speak. The two faced each other in tearful silence.

"I wanted to bring you this myself," the girl faltered, "because — because of what is written on the outside." She held a package of papers toward him. "I have heard him speak of you, I think. Any friend of my father must be a good man. We want to thank you, my mother and I" —

"To thank me?" Erastus questioned, "to thank me! You certainly don't know" —

"I know you were my father's friend," the

girl interrupted; "I don't care about the rest. Possibly I could n't understand it. I know very little about business, but I knew my father."

She got up, holding her head high in grief-stricken pride, and gave her hand to her host and hostess.

The younger Burson girl emerged from the kitchen, a dish-towel and a half-wiped plate clasped to her breast, and watched the visitor as she went down the path.

"Her silk waist does n't begin to touch Millie's for style," she said pensively, "and her skirt does n't even drag; but there 's something about her."

"Yes," acquiesced Mrs. Burson, "there is something about her."

Erastus sat on the edge of the old rep lounge, looking absently at the papers.

"In the event of my death, to be delivered to my friend Erastus Burson," was written on the package.

His wife came and stood over him.

"I don't know just what it means, mother," he said, "there 's a deed, and my note marked

'Paid,' and a lot of two-bit and four-bit pieces. I'll have to get somebody to explain it."

He sat quite still until the woman laid her large hand on his bowed head. Then he looked up, with moist, winking eyes.

"I don't feel right about it, mother," he said. "I wish now I'd 'a' dropped in oftener, and been more sociable. It's a strange thing to say, but I think sometimes he was lonesome; and I'm sure I don't know why, for a kinder, genialer man I never met."

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